

SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS;

BY THE

REV. PHILIP HOLLAND.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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SERMONS

SERMONS

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

SERMON I.

On the Nature, Reasons, and Advantages of public Worship.

of the several people **ACTS 2.**

AND THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APO-

STLES DOCTRINE, AND FELLOWSHIP, AND IN

BREAKING OF BREAD AND PRAYER.

WE have an account in this chapter of the first preaching of the gospel after the resurrection of our Saviour, and of the success with which it was attended. The writer of this book, as sensible of the

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nature

ON THE ADVANTAGES

nature and laws of history, introduces his relation of the propagation of the gospel with that great event, which will assist us in accounting for the wisdom and courage which the apostles discovered in this great undertaking, and for the success which they had in their addresses to mankind on this subject. The event, to which I here refer, you will easily suppose is the effusion of the holy spirit of God, by which their understandings were enlightened with the knowledge of the truths which they were commissioned to deliver, a spirit, which enabled them not only to explain them in the languages of the several people to whom they were to speak, but to confirm them by a variety of wonderful works.

This event now will serve to explain the different appearance which the apostles make, during our Saviour's abode here upon earth, and after his removal from them, and abate the surprise which it might otherwise occasion, to find ignorant fishermen speak on new and difficult subjects with

with such clearness and power, and those who were afraid of persecution publicly declaring the most obnoxious truths, and acting as superior to all fear whilst they fulfilled the ministry with which they were instructed, and approved their fidelity to their great Master.

interested

This event, as it will help to account for the part which they acted, will serve likewise to show whence it happened that their labours were so successful. When we consider what difficulty lay in their way, the prejudices which they had to encounter, and the opposition which they were likely to meet. We shall admire, perhaps, the fortitude and integrity which they discover in the undertaking, but shall have little hope of their success, and can in reason expect no other but that it will end in the ruin of them all. When, on the contrary, we find that they are heard with uncommon attention, that they make great numbers of converts, and are the instruments of propagating opinions which, in the course of a few

years, are carried to so many different countries, and, in less than three centuries, are propagated in all parts of the known world, we can never account for such things, but by supposing what Luke here relates, that they were in an extraordinary manner under the direction and conduct of the holy spirit of God, and that by his concurrence with them their labours were made so effectual.

The success of their ministry, on this the first day in which they were in this extraordinary manner qualified for it, was very great. We read, at the conclusion of Peter's discourse, that they who gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added to the church about three thousand souls. And, to show that the principles which they thus received, were not deserted when the first heat of the impression began to abate, it is added in my text that "they continued
"steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and
"fellowship, and in breaking of bread
"and prayer."

An

An opinion hastily taken up is not apt to be lasting. Those who are so soon persuaded of any thing are apt to be drawn with the same ease to the contrary opinion, and to give up what they had, with perhaps too much haste, assented to. But this was not the case with these converts to the christian religion, for they "continued in the apostles doctrine and fellowship," they adhered to the truths which they had received from them, and entered into the same society with them, that they might be more fully instructed in the christian religion. They formed themselves into a community with the apostles at their head, and attended on the several acts of christian social worship as there was opportunity, in company with them. The particulars here specified, are *breaking of bread* and *prayer*. By breaking of bread, is meant, I suppose, partaking of the memorials of the body of Jesus in the Lord's supper, which, as it should seem, was an act of religion performed by the first christians as often as they met together for public worship.

And by prayer we naturally understand, such expressions of praise, thanksgiving, confession and petition, as their general character, as the creatures of God, or their particular circumstances led them to adopt.

The point which I intend from these words to consider and illustrate is, that it is natural and agreeable to apostolic custom for those who received the christian religion to form themselves into societies for the public worship of God, and for the administration of christian ordinances. But before I enter on this matter, I would recommend to your attention some particulars on public worship in general.

The general ends of religious and social worship are the same in every age of the world, jointly to express before God the sense which we have of his perfections and character, and to fix such impressions of them upon our minds, as may conduce to our cheerful satisfaction in every thing which he appoints, and our willing obedience to his commandment.

The

The institution of public worship is by no means peculiar to the christian religion: it does not appear that there ever has been any form of religion without it. A secret veneration for an invifible fuperior power feems to be natural to the human mind. We fee the marks of contrivance and power far fuperior to what we experience in ourfelves, or have obferved in any of our fellow creatures; we are furrrounded with good things which we did not procure ourfelves, and which no being, whom we fee, had it in their power to beftow upon us; we feel our own indigence, and cannot but have fome fecret apprehenfions that we may derive advantage from the favour and affiftance of thofe above us. Hence we are led to acts of homage, expreffions of gratitude and earneft fupplication; we think it probable that fuperior beings may be prefent with us, though we fee them not; that as their bleffings come down to us, fo our prayers may reach their ears, and find acceptance with them.

Whatever the human mind strongly feels, it is natural to communicate to others. We feel an inclination to communicate our pleasures and pains, and to unite in the outward expression of such sentiments and dispositions as are supposed common to all. What man is there who would be as well pleased with a fair and goodly prospect, or with examining a work of art, if he had no one to whom he might communicate his observations, or with whom he might share his pleasures. Upon the same principle it must give a greater satisfaction to trace out the perfections of the great first cause, and to pay him that homage, which his infinite power and goodness demand from us, in company with others than by ourselves. The acts of prayer, and the expressions of gratitude, would be doubly agreeable to those from whom they proceeded, when many tongues and voices joined in them, or by their countenance and gesture appeared to give their full assent to what was delivered by a single person in the name of the rest; and besides there is something

Something contagious in all human passions, the objects of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, operate far more strongly upon a multitude assembled together, than it is possible they should do upon a particular person. Upon this principle every one would find greater help to the fervour of his devotion, by joining with others in the outward expression of it; his veneration would increase, his gratitude would be established, and a new accession made to his virtue by his repeated resolutions to imitate the goodness which he adores.

As to petitions, it may argue some mixture of human weakness, to imagine that they are more likely to receive a favourable answer, by being presented in society with others, and yet there seems to be some such apprehension naturally arising in the minds of men: for, as they find themselves more likely to obtain a request from an earthly superior, when numbers join in it, they may conclude that their united supplication may have some peculiar influence with God himself.

However

However this be, it is doubtless perfectly reasonable, that those who feel the same wants, and expect supplies for them in the same way, by the favour and blessing of the almighty, should be joint petitioners for it.

These principles and dispositions of the human mind seem sufficient to account for the general practice of social worship. The particular forms of address, and the several rites which were added in particular countries to the pure and simple worship of the Deity, to which nature seems to direct, are more than can be accounted for, or easily reckoned up. It might afford entertainment to a curious mind, to take a view of the religious ceremonies of all nations; but it is sufficient for our present purpose to observe, that natural religion was very much abused and disfigured in all countries, that such a number of absurd practices were introduced with a sacred aspect and character, founded upon such contradictory and impious opinions, that they nearly banished all just sentiments

sentiments of the Deity from the minds of men, and served rather to corrupt and debase their morals, than to aid and improve their virtue.

I proceed to some more particular observations with regard to the original of christian worship, into which it more nearly concerns us to inquire, as it is upon christian principles that it is generally practised among us. That the institution of it is not peculiar to christianity has been observed already, and therefore it is rather taken for granted, that those who professed it would fall into this practice, than particularly and expressly enjoined upon them that they should do so. A person, who will peruse the New Testament with any attention, can hardly doubt whether or no it be agreeable to the design of it, that christians should be frequently called together to offer up their joint addresses to God, and thereby to form themselves to the love and practice of all his commandments; but, if he search into it for a complete system of rules

rules as to the time, the place, and the manner, such as we meet with in the religious institutions of the Jews, and as are referred to in those of many other countries, he will, I fear, be greatly disappointed. The gospel of Jesus is of a more spiritual nature than to admit of such an addition to its pure and excellent precepts; it lays no stress on particular forms and circumstances, and is so far from insisting on numerous and burdensome ceremonies, that it brings those into a state of liberty who were enslaved by them. The spiritual worship of God cannot receive any advantage from it, and it may be greatly hurt by a pompous ritual. So that if the method of worship be plain, easy and simple, suited to the general nature of man, and the particular circumstances of the country in which it is practised, it should seem we equally fulfil our christian obligations, and may be equally regarded by the author of our holy religion, though differing from each other in these smaller matters. But still, it can by no means be allowed that the gospel leaves it a matter

ter of indifference, whether we attend upon any form of religious worship or not. If the example of Jesus will assist us in collecting the rule of our duty, we shall find he observed the times of the synagogue worship, and that he attended on the reading of the law, and himself frequently expounded it in their public assemblies. Beside this, the direction which he gave concerning prayer, seems to have a reference to social, as well as secret prayer; and the ordinances which he instituted to be observed in his church in succeeding ages, particularly that of the Lord's supper, is designed to be an act of social worship, and to be attended upon by christians in their assemblies for this purpose.

We learn from Acts i. 14 where we have the first and most authentic account of the nature of christian societies, that the disciples continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, and when, by the preaching of Peter, their number was considerably increased, we are told concerning

concerning them all, as in the words of the text, that "they continued in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayer." "They, altogether," it is observed, "made one church or religious society; they lived together in one visible external communion, hearkening to the instructions of the apostle, partaking of the Lord's supper, and offering their common praises and prayers to God." It should seem, that wherever the labours of the apostles were prospered, and any considerable number of converts made, societies for the public worship of God were formed upon the same plan, and persons were chosen from among themselves to preside in them, and to conduct their stated services. This appears from the Acts of the Apostles, and with yet stronger evidence, from several of St. Paul's epistles. We find, from the directions which he gives to Timothy and Titus, that their office, to which they

Orr's Sermons.

were

were appointed by the apostle, under the influence of the spirit of God, and for which they were qualified by the extraordinary gifts and powers which they possessed, was to set things in order in the churches which he had planted, to ordain bishops and deacons, and appoint such officers in the several societies of christians, as their particular exigencies required. The particular duties of several of these, plainly respected their ordinary assemblies for religious worship, and the services which were performed in them.

It is acknowledged that the New Testament gives no express commands as to the religious observance of any particular day; but the first christians, we find, frequently met together on the first day of the week, the day of our Saviour's resurrection, which I suppose is, on this account, called by John the Lord's day. Though the Jews were obliged to observe the seventh day of the week, with the most scrupulous exactness, it did not seem agreeable to the milder genius of the christian

christian dispensation, to lay such a burden upon the necks of the disciples. If it had been instituted by Jesus, it does not appear that it could have been observed by the first christians, many of whom were members of families, which had not wholly received the christian faith, the wives, children, or slaves, of husbands, parents or masters. Now it could not be reasonably expected, that these should give the same attendance in their public assemblies, and so entirely devote themselves to prayer, to the apostle's doctrine, and breaking of bread, as those whose time was wholly at their own disposal.

But, though the christian religion is far from encouraging a superstitious regard to days; and though it was neither agreeable to our Saviour's character, nor to the spirit of his religion, to encourage the strictness and severity of the Jews on this subject; yet it is one thing to condemn the abuse of an institution, and another to lay it aside altogether. That our Saviour did not do the latter is evident

dent from his own practice. And though his followers, especially the gentile converts, did not observe the Jewish sabbath, yet it appears, as we have seen, to be their practice from the earliest times, to devote the same proportion of their time to the duties of public worship, and to spend the first day of the week in the services of the solemn assembly, though not with the same superstitious regard for the day, as the Jews expressed for the seventh. And from that time to the present day, it seems to have been observed with a greater or less degree of exactness throughout the whole christian world.

You will easily conjecture, that my thoughts have been turned to this subject at present, by an order from those in authority among us, which has lately been issued to enforce the laws, which, however neglected, are supposed to subsist for the observance of this day. It is obvious, that such regulations will be much more effectual when they proceed from principle, than when they rest on autho-

rity alone; and, if to the command of our civil governors there be added, the good example of the most respectable members of society, and the whole be enforced by good reasonings, on well established principles, the happiest effects may be expected; and, with a prevailing regard to this institution, it may be hoped all the other advantages of civil society will be enlarged and transmitted through all succeeding generations.

I shall, therefore, in my next discourse, consider the pleasures and advantages which may be derived from our public meetings for the worship of God.

SERMON

S E R M O N II.

*On the Nature, Reasons and Advantages of public
Worship.*

ACTS II. 42.

AND THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APO-
STLES DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP, AND IN
BREAKING OF BREAD, AND IN PRAYER.

IT is an observation which can hardly
escape any person of reflection, that no-
thing almost is so common among men as
to fly from one extreme to another. This
we may see not only in different persons,
but in the same person in the different
periods of his life. There is a fashion in
the external duties of religion as well as
in every thing else, and a disposition to

run into extremes with regard to them. Thus the superstition of some shall occasion the impiety of others. Nay, the same person who is at one time remarkable for a zealous adherence to the outward acts of worship, and for a punctual observance of all the rites and ceremonies which are prescribed, shall presently sink into a state of great indolence and indifference about them, which will sometimes end in a total neglect of the offices of devotion. This has happened in former times, and there are instances of it still to be found, and it is often imputed to the superstitious practices which have been introduced into the worship of God, and are with so much zeal contended for by such as are distinguished by an external and ceremonious piety: and yet, if we are disposed to do justice to every cause, it must be acknowledged, that superstition does not more naturally introduce infidelity and impiety, than they in their turns contribute to the growth and increase of superstitions. When the persons who loudly and vehemently inveigh
against

against such corruptions in the worship of God, are found to cast off all fear of the Deity, at least to abandon all the external offices of piety, however just and rational; the advocates for received opinions and customs gain some additional strength to their cause thereby, and have a greater hold on the minds of well-disposed persons, who are afraid of altering or neglecting their usual practice in religion in the least instance, when they see to what lengths others have run who have done so before them.

It was, perhaps, the deserved character of the preceding age, that they laid too great a stress on the external parts of religion, and placed almost the whole practice of piety in the length and fervency of their prayers, in the number of sermons which they heard, and of sacraments which they attended upon. This their error has been seen and sufficiently exposed. Persons of any thought are, for the most part, well aware that this alone will not determine the character to

be worthy and amiable, and that a man may go through all the forms of this sort with the greatest strictness and severity, and yet be deficient in what is of chief importance in religion, and lose the honours and rewards of true piety.

But the great misfortune is, that those who have the justest sentiments on this subject; who see clearly that their external duties are only valuable, as they are the instruments and means of true virtue and goodness of heart; and that their whole value depends on the purposes to which they are improved; have been betrayed into a too great neglect of these helps, and have even proceeded so far as to treat them with contempt. They had reason to believe, they thought, that many frequented the solemn assembly to atone for the vices and follies of their past lives, and to excuse for their continuance in those sins which they were not willing to renounce; and therefore they entirely, or, in a great measure, neglect all the acts of christian communion or fellowship.

And

And, indeed, as soon as a person begins to think lightly of the importance and obligation of any duty, he is in great danger of neglecting it altogether. Thus far we entirely join issue with you, that the acts of worship are chiefly to be valued for the uses to which they are applied; that in those who practise them, without any regard to their moral tendency, they are insignificant and worthless; and that those who make them the cloak of their vices, are guilty of the vilest hypocrisy. But, if any pretend to infer from hence, that they may be innocently or safely neglected, it is obvious that they reason worse than even those who lay a disproportionate stress upon them. These think they contain the whole of religion and virtue, and therefore spend their whole zeal upon them; the others, because their value has been magnified beyond truth and reason, conclude too hastily that they are good for nothing at all.

But whatever a few persons, who would confine all wisdom and knowledge to
C 4 themselves

themselves may determine, the general current opinion of mankind is against them. I had occasion to observe (in discoursing from these words in the morning) that the public worship of God has been a very general, if not an universal practice in the several ages and countries of the world. And though men, in the fulness of their zeal, or from an artful design to enslave the consciences of their fellow-creatures, have made corrupt additions to the true and spiritual worship of God, and have mixed a variety of foolish and hurtful superstitions with it; yet there has still been some general apprehension of its importance and use. It is perfectly agreeable to the principles of human nature, to acknowledge and reverence invisible and superior beings; and it is natural to man, as a social being, to unite with others in disclosing the inward sentiments and dispositions of the heart, by such actions as are most proper to express them.

From hence, I proceeded to consider the institution of christian worship. And, with

with regard to the external acts of it, it was acknowledged, that we have no particular forms which we are obliged invariably to adhere to; that we are left to collect our obligation to an external public worship from what we read of the practice of Jesus and his immediate followers, and the custom of the church in its first and purest form. All we can learn, with any certainty is, that they had public assemblies, according to the different nature and circumstances of their infant societies; that they met together to hear the apostles doctrine; to keep up communion with each other; to break bread in commemoration of their master, and to unite in their addresses to Almighty God; and that, as their churches grew larger, there were persons chosen out from among them, whose office it was, on ordinary occasions, to preside in their public assemblies, and to conduct things in such a manner as might conduce to the honour of the christian religion, and to the edification and comfort of all who professed it. But, as to the particular methods
which

which they observed, and the forms and ceremonies which they used, it is impossible for us to determine with any certainty what they were. Of this we may be certain, that they were plain and simple, suited to the spiritual nature and design of christianity, and to the present circumstances of christians. So that no particular forms of worship appear to be of divine institution, but every society is left to their liberty to conduct it in such a manner as they think may best subserve its nature and design, and be most agreeable to the general direction which we have, that all things be decent and orderly, as becomes the disciples of Jesus, and the servants of the most high God, and as may most tend to the improvement and perfection of rational creatures.

As to the particular day on which the public worship of God should be performed: though the Jewish law does not oblige us to observe the seventh day of the week, and there be no very express direction in the New Testament, that we should

should keep the first; yet, as we find the apostles and first christians frequently met together on that day, as it was the day of our Lord's resurrection, and thence appears to have been called the Lord's day, it seems to have been wisely determined, that this should be the day on which we should repair to the solemn assembly, for the purposes of christian and social worship.

What remains is, that we consider of the pleasures and advantages which may be derived from our public meetings for the worship of God. It might be thought sufficient, perhaps, to say, that it is what the authority of God and man oblige us to, and that we must be disobedient to heaven and slight the ordinances of those who are set in authority over us, if we neglect these duties. After the authority of God, nothing ought to be more sacred with us than the laws and institutions of our native country, which are very express with regard to the due observance of the sabbath, and a stated attendance on religious

ous worship. We have, it is true, the liberty of choosing for ourselves that particular form of divine worship which appears most agreeable to the authority and will of heaven, and most conducive to our own best improvement; but we shall make a bad use indeed of this privilege, if we take encouragement from it to absent ourselves from the public exercises of religion in every form. Rather, indeed, should it supply us with a motive to a more constant, zealous attendance on such forms of devotion as we shall choose, that we may appear more worthy of the distinction with which we are favoured. It should be a concern of every good man, to cultivate in his breast a regard to all the laws of the society by which he is protected in his rights and liberties; and I see not how he at all deserves the character, if he knowingly and obstinately break them, unless they appear to him to be contrary to the laws of God. But where, as in the present case, to the appointment of men there are added the awful sanction of the divine government, it must argue the
the

the highest folly and the greatest depravity of manners not to comply with them.

But it is not proposed to rest our obligations to the duties of religious worship on any authority. I flatter myself, if you will seriously attend to what I have further to offer on the subject, you will be so well convinced of the pleasures and advantages of them, that there will be no need of any further arguments. And,

I. I shall represent to you, some of the principal pleasures with which the duties of religious worship will be attended. True devotion sets before us an object best suited to the highest and noblest powers of the mind. It is fitted to give us the largest conceptions of things, and to open to us sources of pleasure from every quarter. It is agreeable, to contemplate the beauties of nature, to see every thing in its fairest and best dress; the fields covered with a beautiful and refreshing verdure, the trees shooting forth their leaves and blossoms, and the tender blade springing from the earth

earth for the support and nourishment of man and beast. But, when we are taught to add, these are thy glorious works, Father Almighty! This wonderful frame thy workmanship divine! When we can discover in this delightful scene, the infinite skill and perfect goodness of the great parent of the universe, the friend and benefactor of all good men, the present portion and everlasting reward of all those who diligently seek him, we shall survey them with increasing pleasure, and shall experience an accession of strength to our love, hope and confidence, from considering their effects of the divine munificence.

The share which we have in the blessings of this present life, will give us some peculiar delight and satisfaction, when, under the influence of true devotion, we consider them as sent down from above to strengthen and improve our gratitude, and to animate our good purposes and generous endeavours in the path of virtue. The excellencies of our friends will afford us
new

new pleasures, when we consider them as the lively traces of God's most perfect image and likeness. In short, under the influence of devotion we shall pass through all the good and evil things of life with a superior spirit; shall look up to the Supreme Being as the disposer of all the events which concern us; as fixing the bounds of our habitation, and taking the care of all our concerns into his hands. And this will furnish us, at all times, with the best reasons for content and thankfulness, and cause even afflictions themselves to minister to our pleasure as well as advantage.

2. As the exercises of devotion are attended with pleasure, so they will prove of the highest advantage to us. They will give a stability and strength to our virtue, and dispose us to all the necessary acts of justice, and all the tender offices of humanity. A regard to the inspection, authority, and example of the Deity, is the best principle of a good and virtuous life; this will teach us to observe the same
even,

even, uniform tenour of goodness in secret as in public; will curb the insolence of wealth and power, and give an effectual check to their passions whose station sets them above the controul of human laws. If there be a real principle of religion in the heart, false shame and the fear of man will have no such influence, as to deter a person from what is right, or engage him to a bad action. He acts from a higher motive; and with the sense or desire of the divine approbation, thinks it not worthy his regard what men will say of him, or do to him. Hence it is, that the holy scripture speak in such high terms of the fear of God, and sometimes place the whole of religion in this single principle, behold "the fear of the Lord that is wisdom," by the "fear of the Lord men depart from evil;" and in many other passages to the same purport.

And, as the practice of devotion is the great support of our virtue, it will be a noble means of promoting a constant tranquillity and cheerfulness. By directing
our

our thoughts to God at all times, and setting him ever before us, it will give us juster sentiments of the good and evil things of this present life, and preserve us at the same time from insolence in prosperity, and from a too great dejection of spirit in adverse circumstances.

But above all, the uses of devotion, and especially of the public exercises of it, will be experienced by those who are in affliction. Have we sustained great and heavy losses? The thoughts of his providence who presides over the whole, will assure us of a full compensation. Are we deprived of our friends, and the delight of our eyes taken from us by a stroke? When a spirit of true piety teaches us to consider them as resigned to him from whom we received them, and as trusted to his care who has the conduct of the future, as well as of the present world, we shall see abundant reason to be satisfied. These, and such reflections as these, will lead us into the meaning and

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spirit of the sentiment which is so well expressed in our psalm book ;

O Israel trust the Lord, he hears and sees,

He knows thy sorrows and restores thy peace :

His worship does a thousand comforts yield,

He is thy help, and he thy heavenly shield.

These are some of the pleasures and advantages of that devotion which has the perfect goodness of the Supreme Being for its object ; and it must be obvious to every one, that the public exercises of devotion will greatly contribute to secure them. If these good effects may be expected from our addresses to God in private, they will be still more effectually attained by our public services. The expressions of the same affections in the countenances and gestures of those about us, will be of great effect to raise and improve them in our breasts. I had occasion to observe, when accounting for the original of this practice in all nations, that there is something strangely contagious in all human passions ; the objects of joy and sorrow, hope and fear operate far more strongly on multitudes assembled together,

together, than it is possible they should do upon particular persons; and upon this principle each one will find it a great help to his own devotion to join with others in the outward expression of it. His veneration for the perfect goodness of God will acquire new strength by these joint acknowledgments of it; his gratitude will increase by every such public recital of the mercies of heaven, and he will be more resolved for the practice of God's holy commandments.

Not to insist upon it, that to unite together in these expressions of our devotion is perfectly agreeable to the social affections of our nature, and highly conducive to the improvement of them: it is most suitable to the original powers and dispositions of the human mind, that all our pleasures should be communicated and diffused; we were not formed for ourselves alone but for our friends, our country, and all mankind. And it is a proof of a narrow and envious mind, to confine to itself what was designed to be

an universal blessing. If then there be either pleasure or advantage in devotion, it is designed to be universal, to extend to every human creature, to diffuse pleasure every where, and to promote the best improvement of all rational beings. The closest connection subsists in particular among christians, from the common objects of their faith and hope, and it is usual with the sacred writers to draw an excellent lesson of charity from this principle: hence, their christian faith led them immediately to form assemblies for the public worship of God, and it is our duty, as far as we wish to answer the purposes of our holy religion, to imitate them in these particulars, and to meet together in order to present our joint addresses to God in the name of Jesus Christ.

But, besides these expressions of devotion, which are included in direct acts of homage to God, it is a part of public worship to explain some of the truths and duties of religion. And though this may
not

not be so necessary to persons of enlarged understanding and superior knowledge, yet, for christian societies in general, it is plainly of the highest utility. And it may be easily supposed that this has chiefly contributed to the continuance of the christian religion in the world, and to the knowledge of its doctrines and institutions, which diffuses itself among all sorts of persons. And whenever the duties of public worship come to be generally neglected, religion itself will be speedily lost, and with it every thing else which is good and valuable.

It is sometimes reckoned one of the distinguishing characteristics of the present age to make little account of public worship, and it is well if there be not too much truth in the charge. Are we not acquainted with those who pay so little regard to the returning opportunities for this purpose, that the slightest indisposition, or the most trifling engagement, will be a sufficient excuse for neglecting them.

In proportion as you neglect the public worship of God, you will lose that reverence which is due for him; you will diminish that cheerful confidence in his perfections which will be your best support under the afflictions of life, and will banish the fear of him from your minds, and so take away one of the most effectual restraints on the practice of that which is evil. Nor will the unhappy effects of such a practice rest with yourselves, but will extend to all those who are the witnesses of it. The contagion of this wretched habit will spread itself from one to another, till, first to think lightly of these services, and then to neglect them, shall become the general character of society,

And if any in this number are heads of families, and have children and servants under their care, whom they should bring up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, how sadly will it defeat the good influence of their instructions and advices, when their example has so unhappy an effect

effect as to turn them from the way in which they should go. Thus the rising generation, on whom our eyes are fixed as the supports and ornaments of religion in the succeeding age, will afford us only the melancholy prospect that religion will die with them.

But I wish not to indulge such melancholy expectations; I would willingly hope that I am mistaken in the fact, and that it is your desire, and will continue to be your practice, to countenance the public worship of God by your stated attendance, by a suitable deportment when you are engaged in this service, and by a temper and character which shall reflect the highest honour upon it. Thus will you preserve the sacred privilege with which you have been intrusted, and transmit it, in some good degree of purity, to the next age: thus will you consult your highest interest at present, and your everlasting happiness.

with them.

S E R M O N I I I .

*On the Conversion and Character of Paul, bearing
Testimony to the Sufferings of Jesus.*

ACTS xxvi. 23.

THAT CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER, AND THAT HE
SHOULD BE THE FIRST THAT SHOULD RISE FROM
THE DEAD, AND SHOULD SHOW LIGHT UNTO
THE PEOPLE AND TO THE GENTILES.

THE preceding verse, which is a part
of the same sentence with the words of
my text, is, “having therefore obtained
“help of God, I continue unto this
“day, witnessing both to small and great,
“saying none other things than those
“which the prophets and Moses did say
“should

"should come, that Christ should suffer,"
&c. &c.

The circumstances in which our great apostle was, when he delivered the discourse, of which the words of my text are a part, are well worthy our attention. He was attacked by the Jews at Jerusalem in a tumultuous manner; he was preserved from instant death by the interposition of the chief captain Lyfias, who had the command of a guard of Roman soldiers, stationed near the temple, to prevent any popular insurrection, or quell such as might happen to arise. Paul being thus taken under the protection of the Romans, and his life being threatened at Jerusalem, it was thought advisable to remove him to Cesarea. Here he pleaded for himself before Felix the Roman governor, who deferred the determination of the cause, with the expectation that money would be given him by Paul or some of his friends, to obtain his release. At the end of two years, when he was succeeded in his province by Portius Festus,

Festus, to gratify the Jews, to whom he had made himself very obnoxious during his government, he left Paul bound, and devolved on his successor the trouble of determining his cause.

Festus going up to Jerusalem, upon his arrival in the province, was solicited by the Jews there, that he would order Paul to be brought up thither, designing to lie in wait for him and kill him on the way; but this the governor not choosing to grant, and ordering his accusers to come to Cesarea, they appeared against him there, and charged him with many crimes, which they were unable to prove to the governor's satisfaction. But he, desirous to ingratiate himself with them in the beginning of his government, proposed it to Paul to go up to Jerusalem, and to be tried in his presence before the Jewish council. The cause, it might be pretended, concerned opinions and customs peculiar to the Jewish nation with which he was unacquainted, and of which the Roman law took no cognizance, and would

would therefore be most properly tried in courts appointed for this purpose. Thus did he avoid either condemning or acquitting the prisoner, though he could not but perceive that by this step he put him into the hands of his inveterate enemies. The apostle himself was too well acquainted with the sentiments and views of his countrymen to consent to this proposal. And, as it was not easy to say what effect the importunity of the Jews might have on the governor, he determined to provide for his own safety by an appeal to Cæsar, i. e. to the Roman emperor. "I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged; to the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest: for, if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but, if there be none of these things, whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar." This privilege he had as a Roman citizen; the Roman law permitted all such to make this appeal, if they chose to do it before sentence was passed,

passed, in which case it was not in the power of any of the subordinate governors to offer them any violence; and this was a privilege which the apostle very properly asserted on this occasion.

In the interval between this appeal and his setting out for Rome, Herod Agrippa, the son of that Herod who is mentioned before in this history, and a descendant of Herod the Great, together with Bernice, with whom, though his sister, he lived in a scandalous familiarity, came on a visit to this new governor, to congratulate him on his arrival in the province. Festus happening to mention the affair which had just come before him, relating to Paul, Agrippa expressed a desire to see and hear him. And, on the day following, Agrippa and Bernice appeared in great pomp, and, together with Festus and the chief captains and principal men of the city, went to the hall where such causes were heard, and Paul was presently brought before them.

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He stands forth a poor, helpless man, without having a friend or advocate among them, and with nothing to support him but the clearness of his intentions, and the innocence and integrity of his life. His appearance, according to his own account of it elsewhere, was such as would create no prejudices in his favour, and his present circumstances would probably increase the disregard and contempt with which he was likely to be heard. The subject was not likely to be acceptable to the audience, and the probable event of his address must be the contempt and displeasure of those to whom it was made.

The extraordinary manner in which he acquits himself in so difficult a circumstance, is worthy of our observation: his courage and presence of mind do not fail him in the presence of the greatest personages; and yet he is far from being deficient in that respect which was due to them as his earthly superiors. The genuine eloquence and easy politeness, with
which

which he addresses himself to Agrippa; are such that one would be ready to think he had spent his whole life in a court. But no respect for men ever tempts him to forget the office which he sustained, and the ministry with which he was entrusted. His subject leads him to speak much of himself; but the plain tendency of it is, to recommend and promote the christian cause.

The character, conversion and ministry of Paul have generally been reckoned to afford a very strong argument for the truth of christianity; and in this light I propose to consider the history which he gives in this chapter, which I shall not scruple to illustrate as occasion offers, with such particulars as the other parts of this book, as well as his epistles, afford us; and,

First, He begins with relating his conversation and character before he embraced the christian religion. He ventures to leave the relation to his countrymen themselves,

themselves, who, with all their prejudices against him, would find themselves obliged to acknowledge, that his former life and character were unexceptionable, and that he had not only professed the Jewish religion, but had followed the strict and severe institution of the pharisees themselves. And, that he might not be thought to have renounced the grand principle of Judaism, now he was become a christian, he adds, that it was for his hope in the promise which God had made unto the Fathers, that he was now judged and treated as an enemy to his own nation and to their religion. So that in the chief points of doctrine he was of the same opinion with his bitter persecutors. They professed their hopes in the promises of God, and particularly those which respected the future happiness of good men; and it was for the sake of these hopes, he observes, that he himself was in bonds. And here, to obviate any objection which might be made to a future state, or, perhaps, to rebuke the scorn which he might discover in the countenances of some of his

his

his hearers, he puts this short but pertinent question, Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? No one can pretend to say, that it is impossible that the dead should return to life by his power, by whom they were first brought into being, or that it was unsuitable to his perfections, or to the ends of his providence. All that could be said then, was, that we had no experience of it; but whoever should hence conclude, that it was entirely incredible, must say, that every thing was so which had not fallen within the compass of his own observation. But those who were brought thus far, and acknowledged that the supposition of the dead being raised was not in itself incredible, would be prepared to receive such testimonies to the certainty of it as the apostle had afterwards to produce.

To give the greater credit to his own testimony in particular, in favour of christianity, he observes, that he had once

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been

been strongly prejudiced against it, and even thought himself obliged in conscience to oppose it, and to treat those with the utmost severity who paid any regard to Jesus of Nazareth. This he did, he observes, in the city of Jerusalem; and the description which he gives us of his unwearied activity and zeal against all who professed the christian name, marks in the strongest manner the character of a bitter and vehement persecutor. Many of the saints, says he, in virtue of the authority which I had received from the chief priests, I shut up in prison, and when they were put to death I gave my voice against them. He began, you observe, with inflicting lighter penalties, and thence proceeded to the greatest. This is perfectly agreeable to the nature of things, and it will be found to be true universally, that those who can allow themselves to show the least severity to their brethren, for a principle of conscience, will never stop, but proceed, by degrees, to the greatest extremities. There is one article in this part of his character

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which, however extraordinary it may appear, is, I believe, by no means singular. "I punished them often in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme," *i. e.* I suppose, to revile the person and character of Jesus, thus choosing to expose them to the guilt of hypocrisy, rather than tolerate them in an opinion different from his own. Thus can the persecutor satisfy himself with being the instrument of an evident and a culpable dissimulation, whilst he pretends to have a zeal for the cause of God and the honour of religion. He finishes the description of this part of his character with these words, "and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to strange cities."

This is the account which the apostle gives before his embracing the christian religion; and it affords a very lively picture of the wretched effects of religious zeal, when it is under the conduct of a misinformed and an erroneous mind. The apostle, it is evident, was from the begin-

ning a man of great integrity. He had a sincere regard to God and religion, and acted from a principle of conscience in every part of his life. And yet, into what excesses was he driven, from want of duly considering the nature and consequences of his actions. He had a zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge. When he came to inquire, he found that the very persons whom he had treated with so much cruelty, were not only of innocent characters, but worthy of his esteem and veneration; and, on more mature consideration, he embarked in the same cause, and spent his life among the persons whom he had once thought unworthy to live.

2. And this leads me to the next part of his history; his conversion to christianity. Whilst he was proceeding in this mad career, and persecuting the christians, not only in Jerusalem but in other cities, he became, in an extraordinary manner, an advocate for the cause which he had opposed, and from being a bitter enemy

to

to the name and religion of Jesus, commenced one of its warmest and most zealous defenders. His own relation of the cause of this wonderful change is as follows: whilst he was pursuing the design which he had formed, of routing out the christians, and in the madness of his rage against them, following them to strange cities, among other places to which his violence carried him, he went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests, to seize all of that belief whom he should find, and to bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was on his way to this city, he was stopped by a vision with which he was favoured. He saw on a sudden, in the middle of the day, when it was less likely that his imagination should impose upon him, a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about him and those who journeyed with him. The splendour of it was so great, that it quite overpowered his mortal sense; and he, as well as his companions, were struck to the ground; and in this situation he heard a

voice speaking to him distinctly in the Hebrew tongue, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? What is the meaning of this thy violent opposition to my religion, and thy bitter malice to those who profess it?" And when he asked, who art thou Lord? To his astonishment and confusion this answer was returned, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest, it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." A proverbial expression, to signify undertakings which would end in the hurt and ruin of those who persisted in them. Saul asking in the utmost fright, "Lord what wilt thou have me to do:" the Lord said unto him, "arise and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do." Some of these particulars I have added from the account which we have in the ninth chapter of this book, from which, when compared with the twenty-second, it appears that, for some time, he lost the use of his eyes; that he was led by his companion into the city of Damascus; was visited by Ananias; received his sight by his

his means; was baptized by him into the christian faith; and from this time was a zealous defender of the cause which he had, till now, opposed.

This is the apostle's own account of his conversion to christianity; and with this, as it should seem, he connects in the context another revelation, which he had from Jesus, in which he was made a minister of his word, and a witness of his resurrection, and ordered to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, as the means of opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified through faith in him.

The credit of this relation, it is easy to see, rests, in a great measure, on the apostle's own testimony; and it is readily acknowledged, if it stood alone and had no connection with the other parts of his life, we should be ready to impute it

either to the strength of his imagination, and conclude that he was imposed upon himself, and thought he saw and heard what had no existence, and was never said, or, that he had a design to impose upon others, by the relation of his visions, in order to procure a higher veneration for his person, and a greater regard to his doctrine. But, when we consider the change which it made in his whole manner of life, that it introduced him into the ministry of a religion which was intended to serve the cause of morality, and to promote the best interests of mankind; and that from this time he was a zealous advocate for a religious institution which is remarkably free from all the flights of enthusiasm, we can hardly allow ourselves to believe that he was imposed upon himself. And, when we observe what flattering views and interests he gave up among his countrymen and former friends, to what ignominy and sufferings he exposed himself in the cause of the gospel, and what an unshaken integrity he discovered on the greatest occasions,

sions, we can never allow ourselves to imagine, that he had any design to put the cheat upon others, and draw them to the belief of that of which he was not himself persuaded. It remains, then, if this particular be considered, not only that he was himself convinced of the divine original of the christian religion, but, that he was convinced of it on just and rational principles.

As to the persons who went with him, their testimony is not to be alleged upon the present occasion; as we know not what it was, and it no where appears from the sacred history what effect this extraordinary appearance had upon them. There is, however, this very strong presumption, that they could not disprove the apostle's relation; as in Jerusalem itself, whence they had gone with him, he ventured in the most public manner to give a particular relation of the affair, and, as it were, to appeal to them for the truth of it. This he would never have done, but either from a persuasion that
his

his relation would not reach their ears, or that it was not in their power to disprove it. Since I have mentioned the case of these persons, it may not be amiss to take notice of an inconsistency, which, at the first hearing, there may appear to be between the relation as it is given by the historian and by Paul. Luke says in the ninth chapter of this book, "and the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man." The apostle himself in the twenty-second chapter; "and they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." But it is easy to suppose, that when the apostle says they heard not the voice, his meaning might be, that though they might hear the voice of one speaking, which is all that is said in the former place, yet they might not hear it so distinctly and particularly as to know the very words. And this entirely reconciles these seemingly different accounts.

Add

Add to this, to confirm the credit of the relation which I have been considering, that though in any other history the truth of it might be questioned, where it would stand alone without any collateral circumstances, yet, as one event among many in the plan of Divine Providence tending to this one great point, to establish the christian religion, a religion so evidently worthy of God, and so conducive to the best interests of mankind, it acquires a probability and evidence which no human testimony could give it. For the miracles of Jesus, his resurrection from the dead, and the gifts of the spirit to the apostles, all stand in so close a connection, and have such a tendency to support and establish each other by their common subserviency to the same great cause, that any one of the relations will be more easily received for the sake of the rest. The miraculous conversion of Paul is, in like manner, connected with them; and the effect which it had to the spread of the christian religion, particularly among the Gentiles, will cause it to partake

take of the general evidence which christianity itself has.

3. We now come to the third period of the history of the apostle, viz. his behaviour after his conversion. Of this too we have a brief relation from himself, in the words which precede the text. For, after he had related the commission which he had received from our Lord, he adds, "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly "vision." And the account which he gives of the great end of his preaching is a noble testimony to the moral tendency of christianity; "but showed first to them "of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and "throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and "then to the Gentiles, that they should "repent and turn to God, and do works "meet for repentance," or bring forth the worthy fruits of repentance. In the apostle's estimation, therefore, the great end of christian preaching was to lead men to virtue and obedience. "For this cause," says he, "the Jews caught me in the temple,

ple, and sought to kill me." All the offence which I had given them, was the use of my best endeavours to bring men of every nation to repentance and obedience.

The following verse may be considered as a kind of apology, and may serve to remove any prejudices, which his having related such extraordinary things of himself might happen to occasion. "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue to this day, giving my testimonies to the truths of God in whatever presence I happen to come, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come, that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first who should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people and to the Gentiles."

The conduct of the apostle, in future life, was worthy the very full and entire conviction which he had of the divine mission

mission of our Saviour. His labours, as a minister of the christian religion, were greater than those of any of the other apostles; and his sufferings were such as to give a sufficient proof of his integrity and constancy. We see in the text the chief things which he was concerned to support: first, that Christ should suffer. His meaning is, that it was agreeable to the predictions of the old prophets, and the descriptions which they had always given of Christ, or the Messiah. This was a subject of great importance to a Jewish audience, who were strongly possessed with the notion, that their Messiah was to appear as a conquering and triumphant prince, and to raise the Jewish people to great outward prosperity and splendour. To us, who have not the same prejudices to struggle with, it is a matter of inferior consequence; though, if it were necessary, it would be easy to produce many passages from the Old Testament which suppose this: but the single one from the fifty-third of Isaiah, which seems as certainly to refer to the
Messiah

Messiah as any in the whole Bible, may be sufficient to our present purpose. Here he is spoken of as despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as taken from prison and judgment, as led to the slaughter, and submitting, with the patience of a lamb, to the murderer's stroke; as cut off from the land of the living, as numbered with the transgressors, as bearing the sins of many, and making intercession for the transgressors.

These are descriptions sufficiently plain of the Messiah, and show abundantly that he was to pass through suffering; but still it may appear strange to some, that so excellent a person as Jesus was should be delivered up to the will of his enemies. Now to these it might perhaps be sufficient to observe, that it is not at all inconsistent with the general course and order of Divine Providence, that men of the most eminent virtue should pass through very grievous calamities; there are few histories which will not furnish

us with instances to confirm this observation. Nay more, it often happens that the very integrity of good men exposes them to such trials. This was the case with Socrates among the Athenians; and this was remarkably the case with the primitive christians. If their principles would have admitted of the practice of a little dissimulation, they might have escaped that heavy weight of sufferings, under which they laboured; and have recommended themselves, in the other parts of their character, to the esteem and approbation of all. It is not difficult to suppose that there may be reasons in the plan of Providence for permitting these things. It may serve to display their exemplary integrity, to confirm their patience and other virtues, and to train them up in the expectation of a glorious immortality.

But, besides this general reason, the sufferings and death of Christ had a peculiar importance. It is not possible for us, perhaps, to discern all the reasons of them,

or

or to point out all the great purposes, which they were intended to serve in the scheme of providence; but we easily perceive that they were a remarkable confirmation of the truth of his doctrine, and that they tended to make his example more complete. They help to reconcile good christians in all ages to their portion of calamity however great, and encourage their continued dependance on the providence of God.

To this useful purpose let us faithfully apply them, and as often as we consider any of the circumstances which serve to prove the truth of the christian religion, let the view which we take of them incite us to greater diligence in the duties of the christian life, to a joyful expectation of the blessings which the gospel proposes to our acceptance; and, in particular, prepare us to commemorate the excellencies with which the character of Jesus was distinguished, and to seek a larger portion of his spirit, that we may be prepared for his kingdom.

There have been things said of the sufferings of Christ, which I am no way qualified to explain to you. Thus he is said by some, to have the sins of men imputed to him; that he suffered to take away the punishment of them; and that we can hope for the divine forgiveness only in consequence of what he suffered, or by having his righteousness imputed to us; that his sufferings have averted the divine vengeance and procured the divine mercy: but as these are things by much too high for my understanding, I should only expose myself by offering them to your consideration. I have just observed, that his sufferings are a great confirmation of the truth of his doctrine, and in that light serve to encourage our dependance on the divine goodness, and to lead us to expect forgiveness on repentance, and the accomplishment of all the other promises which he has made us, by Jesus Christ. And this, perhaps, with a proper allowance for the allusive manner in which the sacred writers appear to delight, will be sufficient to account for what they

have

have said on this subject. Though I very readily allow, that so grand an event in the scheme of Providence, as the death of our Saviour, is very imperfectly understood by us; that there may be reasons for it which we cannot understand, and consequences from it which we are incapable of discerning. But these notions we should be very cautious of carrying so far as to reflect on the character of God, or to injure the cause of piety and virtue in the world.

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SERMON IV.

*On the Consequences which may be drawn from
the Resurrection of Jesus.*

ACTS xxvi. 26.

**THAT CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER, AND THAT HE
SHOULD BE THE FIRST THAT SHOULD RISE FROM
THE DEAD, AND SHOULD SHOW LIGHT UNTO THE
PEOPLE, AND TO THE GENTILES.**

IN the first clause of the verse the apostle speaks of the necessity of Christ's sufferings, meaning that they were necessary in order to accomplish what the prophets had foretold: but beside this reason, which could have its weight with the Jews alone, who acknowledged the divine original of the Jewish scriptures,

I endeavoured, in a former discourse, to assign some others. To what has been said already, it may be added, that his death was necessary in order to his resurrection, which we may consider as the pillar of our faith and hope as christians.

The evidence of it chiefly rests on the testimony of the apostles, which, it must be acknowledged, was abundantly sufficient. Whether we consider their number or character, the manner in which they gave their testimony, or the purposes which it was intended to answer, we shall acknowledge it as sufficient to establish the fact, and to convince every reasonable person that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead. But, instead of pursuing this subject on the present occasion, it will, perhaps, be more useful, and equally agreeable, to consider the consequences which may be drawn from the resurrection of Jesus.

But, before I proceed to this part of the subject, I shall observe, that when
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the apostle speaks of Jesus as the first that should rise from the dead, he must be understood to mean the first that should rise from the dead to immortal glory, so as not to be again subject to the stroke of death.*

If now we receive the testimony of the apostles and other witnesses to this fact, it will follow, as a necessary consequence, that the christian religion is of divine original, or, in other words, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God with power. It is evident from his history, that our Saviour assumed the character of a teacher sent from God; he constantly professes, that the design of his coming into the world was to deliver to mankind the things which he had seen and heard with his Father, the supreme and eternal God; or to preach the doctrine, which he had received from him. Under this character he went about from place to place, to instruct all those, who were willing to attend upon him, in the nature of true

* Might not the words be rendered the chief, who was to rise from the dead, intimating, that Jesus was the chief or principal witness to the great doctrine of the resurrection?

religion, and to direct them in the way to eternal life. In pursuance of this design to instruct and save the world, he performed a variety of miraculous cures on diseased persons, and was the author of other such extraordinary works as it was thought impossible for any one to do, unless God was with him. Besides his occasional hearers, who were often very numerous in the several places to which he came, he chose out a number of stated followers to be his assistants in the execution of his important enterprise, and to communicate to others the instruction which they received from him. It was the chief business of these persons to be the depositaries of what Jesus taught, and to give their faithful testimony to the extraordinary interesting particulars of his life. They did not enter into his service, it may be, with the justest notions of the nature and design of his undertaking; they had the same prejudices with the rest of their countrymen the Jews, as to the person of the Messiah, and the design of his appearance. They expected,

pected him to be a temporal prince and a conqueror; to restore the Jews to their former dignity and power, and to bring the other nations of the earth into subjection to them. They hoped, it should seem, that temporal rewards and honours would be bestowed by him as by other great princes, and that those who adhered to his cause, would be his principal favourites and chief ministers in the kingdom which he was to erect. The apostles of Jesus, who were men of great goodness, though not free from the prejudices and passions, or above the imperfections which cleave to all human creatures, did yet conclude that the kingdom of the Messiah, together with great outward splendour, would be a kingdom of righteousness; that it would be distinguished from other great and mighty empires which had been formed, by producing a general reformation of manners, by bringing men to sincere repentance and true virtue, and establishing the worship of the one true God on the ruins of idolatry, and every other species of impiety.

piety. They were well prepared to be the ministers of the christian religion by the integrity of their lives, and in many instances discover that simplicity of temper and character which leads to the purest virtue. But our Saviour found great occasion to correct the ambitious or interested views, which they entertained; he knew that they were mistaken in their sentiments of his design, and that they were under the influence of dispositions, which would be a great hindrance to them in the prosecution of it. When, therefore, they had attained to a proper assurance of his divine mission, from an acquaintance with his general doctrine and character, and more particularly from the testimony which the Father gave to him in the numerous and beneficent miracles which he enabled him to perform, our Saviour is studious to correct their mistakes, and to lead them by slow degrees, as their prejudices would admit, to a juster conception of the nature and design of his undertaking. In direct opposition to their opinion, that the Messiah was to conquer

conquer and reign, he assures them that he was to suffer and die; that his enemies would appear at least to prevail against him; that they would take away his life, and that he should be laid in the grave, but that on the third day he should rise again, and should send them out with full power and authority to preach his doctrine, and to bring men to the reception of it, not by outward violence, but by the force of truth and conviction, and such means as were best suited to the nature of rational creatures and moral agents.

This, it is obvious, was a method of proceeding with his followers, which had all the appearance of truth and candour, and afforded a strong presumption that he was not imposing upon them by a curious story, but instructing them in such things as concerned the kingdom of God. After our Saviour had, in this manner, prepared the minds of his disciples for what was to follow, they could not acknowledge him for a divine teacher, unless, accord-

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ing to his own prediction, he should actually rise from the dead. But, when they were convinced, not by flying stories and uncertain reports, for such would not have satisfied them, but by the testimony of their senses, that Jesus was risen, they were then fully persuaded of his divine authority and commission, and resumed their former expectations from him. Without this proof it is evident they would not have acknowledged him for the Messiah, or have trusted in him as their Saviour. But, when convinced that he was risen, they were no longer offended with the circumstances of his having expired on the cross, and been laid in the grave. The high opinion which they had conceived of his character returned, and they entertained the joyful expectation of the full accomplishment of his promises. *It is manifestly evident, that the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of the kingdom of God.* If now, by the testimony of the apostles and other concurrent circumstances, we are persuaded to believe this great truth, that he who was crucified rose again,

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we shall find ourselves obliged to acknowledge, that he was the messenger of the Father, and raised up to communicate to the world the instructions which he had received from him. For what can we conceive more repugnant to our best notions of the divine perfections and character, than that he should give so extraordinary a testimony to one, who had not received any commission or authority from him? The return of a person to life, especially after he has been buried, and lain some time in the grave, is an event so uncommon and extraordinary, that we cannot help concluding that it is intended to answer some very important purpose. We know not that it ever happened from the creation of the world to the present time, unless to give testimony to the prophetic character of one or other of God's messengers. There are instances in the New Testament, where, by the words of Jesus, those who were known to be dead, were called back to life; but this happened not so much in kindness to the particular persons concerned,

cerned, though this appears not to have been wholly disregarded by Jesus : but there was a higher reason for it, that by the performance of so illustrious a miracle, it might appear that Jesus Christ was commissioned by his Father, the supreme and eternal God, to restore true religion, to promote the practice of virtue, and to conduct his faithful followers to eternal life and happiness. We can draw no conclusion from the resurrection of Lazarus, of the widow's son, or of Jairus' daughter, with regard to the greatness or excellency of their characters. It was agreeable to the will of God, that the appearance of his Son in the world should be distinguished by such acts of power and beneficence : and we are, in a great measure, strangers to the reasons which led to the choice of such and such particular persons. But whatever regard there might be to the particular circumstances of the families to which these persons belonged, which might point them out as the objects of these miracles, in preference to others who must have fallen under the notice

notice of Jesus; yet the highest reason why these miracles were performed at all, was to make the Son of God so conspicuous in the world, that a greater number of persons might be prevailed upon to regard his instructions, and to depend on the accomplishment of his promises.

But this great end of engaging the attention of mankind to the religious instructions of Jesus, would be more fully answered by his own resurrection. His stated followers, it is true, had many convincing proofs of his wisdom and integrity. If the history of his death and resurrection had been lost, we might still have concluded, from their accounts of him, that he was sent from God on some very great and important design; but it adds greatly to our assurance of his near and intimate relation to God, that he was thus honoured by him at his death. Some of the ancient prophets raised others to life, but none of them ever returned themselves from the state of the dead. This act of power was reserved to add to
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the evidence, which other circumstances gave to the superior character of our blessed Saviour; and to ascertain to all future ages this very important fact, that he was the Son of God, and that his scheme of religion is of divine authority.

Whatever then is contained in the gospel revelation, of importance to our present or future happiness, was to be considered as standing in close connection with the resurrection of Jesus. As it affords a clear unanswerable proof of the truth of christianity, it obliges us to observe the laws of our holy religion, and encourages our dependance on the accomplishment of its promises. The resurrection of Jesus, then, may be improved into a powerful argument to a life of virtue and obedience. Whatever contributes to strengthen the evidence for the divine original of the gospel, supplies a forcible motive to live according to the rules of it. So that there is no branch of the argument for the truth of the christian religion, which does not hold forth

forth a new reason to maintain the christian character, and to live and act agreeably to our profession. As the resurrection of Christ is the great pillar, on which all our reasoning for the truth of christianity rests; it does, in a particular manner, enforce our obligations to a conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. This observation will explain the apostle's reasoning (Romans vi. 4.) "We are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead, by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, that having been planted together in the likeness of his death, we should be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Which Dr. Clarke thus explains: the death and resurrection of Christ, into which we are baptized, and whereof baptism is an emblem, ought to be a perpetual obligation upon us to rise from the death of sin to the spiritual life of righteousness and holiness. The language, which Paul uses (Colossians ii. 12.) is of the same kind, and will admit

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of the same interpretation : “ buried with
 “ him in baptism, wherein also ye are
 “ risen with him through the faith of the
 “ operation of God, who hath raised him
 “ from the dead ;” and, (in Coloss. iii. 1.)
 “ if ye be risen with Christ, seek those
 “ things which are above, where Christ
 “ sitteth on the right-hand of God.” And,
 in the third verse ; “ For ye are dead,
 “ *i. e.* dead to sin, and your life is hid
 “ with Christ in God ;” the meaning of
 which words is explained in the next
 verse, “ when Christ, who is our life,
 “ shall appear, then shall we also appear
 “ with him in glory.”

The resurrection of Christ, as it proves
 that the laws of his religion are divine,
 so it assures us that the sanctions of them
 shall be executed. There is not a more
 powerful argument to abstain from the
 practice of that which is sinful, and to
 abound in the fruits of righteousness,
 than the consideration of the future judg-
 ment, when the actions and characters of
 every particular person shall be tried, and
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it shall be rendered to every one according to his works. It is the doctrine of the New Testament, that God has committed all judgment to the Son, and that the whole world must appear at his tribunal, and receive their sentence from him. This is represented as in a particular manner connected with the truth of our Lord's resurrection. Thus (in Acts x. 40, 42.) "Him God raised up the third day, and commanded us to testify that it is he, who was ordained by God to be the judge of the living and dead." And (in Acts xvii. 31.) "God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

The resurrection of Jesus leads us to expect forgiveness of sins on our repentance. This interesting truth, though probable from the light of nature alone, receives a very agreeable confirmation from the promises contained in the gospel.

This great privilege is sometimes mentioned by the sacred writer, as having some peculiar connection with our Lord's resurrection. Thus (in Romans iv. 25.) Paul says that Christ was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification, or forgiveness. In Colossians ii. 13. those who were dead in trespasses and sins, God is said to have quickened together with Jesus, or to have raised from a state of misery and condemnation to a new and spiritual life, or to the hope of eternal life, having forgiveness of all their trespasses.

Lastly, The doctrine of a future existence, and of eternal life and happiness, stands in close connection with the resurrection of Christ. Hence the apostle, (in 1 Corinthians xv. 20.) after enumerating the testimonies given to this fact, and considered some of the objections made to it, concludes: "now is Christ
"risen from the dead, and become the
"first fruits of those who sleep." This is the use which the first preachers of the
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christian religion perpetually made of this doctrine, thus (Romans viii. 11.) "If
" the spirit of him, who raised up Jesus
" from the dead, dwell in you, he who
" raised up Christ from the dead shall
" also quicken your mortal bodies by his
" spirit, which dwelleth in you." And,
in 1 Thessalonians iv. 14. "If we believe
" that Jesus died and rose again, even so
" those also who sleep in Jesus will God
" bring with him," or God, by Jesus, will
bring those who sleep together with him,
or as well as him. Another apostle makes
it the subject of an hymn of praise to
God; "blessed be the God and Father of
" our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according
" to his abundant mercy, hath begotten
" us again to a lively hope, by the resur-
" rection of Christ from the dead, to an
" inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and
" which fadeth not away, reserved in hea-
" ven for you." 1 Peter i. 3. This is
an expectation which is of the utmost
importance to the steady virtue and per-
severing obedience of sincere christians in
a state of trial. They may not at present

experience all the happy consequences of their fidelity and courage; they may be in a state of great and heavy afflictions in body and mind; they may be in the power of their enemies, and exposed to the severest sufferings; but, if they continue in their duty, they have the sure prospect of a state of happiness, which will satisfy all their desires, and abundantly recompense all their past sufferings. "Blessed, or happy are they, who shall be thought worthy to obtain that life and the resurrection from the dead. For thenceforth they shall be before the throne of God, and shall serve him day and night in his temple; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." Our Saviour endeavours to strengthen the expectations of his apostles, from this circumstance, that the experience which they had had of his fidelity, encouraged their full dependance on his word. "If it were not so,

“so, I would have told you ; I go to prepare a place for you. But after all this, if they had not seen him, and conversed with him after his death, they might have had some ground to fear, whether he was indeed able to accomplish what he had undertaken. But his resurrection from the dead silenced all their doubts ; and dispelled all their fears : and we, as far as these things are discovered to us, may depend on the full accomplishment of his promises, and hope for eternal life as his disciples.

This view of the subject will, I trust, recommend it to our frequent, serious consideration. Believing that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, we shall see evidently that his doctrine is of divine original ; and thence we may conclude, the unspeakable importance of obeying the law of his religion ; and, in the consciousness of our integrity, may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

SERMON V.

Christians Lights in the World.

MATT. v. 16.

LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT
THEY, SEEING YOUR GOOD WORKS, MAY GLORIFY
YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN.

PART I.

THE meaning and spirit of these words will be more evident, by considering their connection with the preceding verses. At the fourteenth verse our Saviour, addressing himself to his disciples, says, ye are the lights of the world, referring to their lives as the ministers of his religion, who were appointed by the providence of God to enlighten the minds of their fellow-creatures with the knowledge of
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divine truth, and to afford them the best directions in the journey of life. Our Saviour proceeds to a sentiment in the next verse, which this metaphor evidently suggested: "a city, which is set upon a hill, cannot be hid." If men choose such a conspicuous situation for any building, it is not that it may be concealed, but seen and observed; or, if they light a candle, it is not to put it under a bushel, or to cover it up, which make it quite useless, but to set it on a stand, that it may give light to all that are in the house. What then can be supposed is the design of Providence in raising you my disciples to so conspicuous a station? is it that you should be concealed from the eyes of men; that ye should seek retirement; that ye should keep within your own breasts the truths which ye have received, or behave as if ye were ashamed to discover the influence they have upon you? On the contrary, it is manifestly his purpose that they should be known and observed, and accordingly your duty is to let your light so shine before men.

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These words have been explained as referring, solely to the circumstances of the apostles, and those who were to be their companions and assistants in preaching the gospel. They are therefore considered as an exhortation to them to be very faithful and diligent in delivering to others the truths, which they had received from Jesus Christ, and to order their own conversation in such a manner as might be most ornamental to the doctrine, which they preached.

According to this interpretation, we shall be thought to have little or no concern in the precepts which they contain. But, though this might be more particularly interpreted, there seems no necessity of confining them to this sense. They recommend a duty common to all good men, in every station of life and age of the world. All the professors of the christian religion may, with particular propriety, be called upon to endeavour so to adorn it by their good works, that many others may be engaged to glorify
God

God on their account. Hence the apostle Peter, in an address to christian converts in general, says, "dearly beloved, "I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which "war against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, "that whereas they speak against you, as "evil doers, they may, by your good "works which they shall behold, glorify "God in the day of visitation."

In discoursing from these words, I propose, first, to consider the character given of christians, that they are the lights of the world. This is the well known character of our Saviour himself, and he is spoken of as the light of the world, in so many places, that some or other of them will easily occur to your thoughts. Whoever considers that it was his office to convey the most useful instructions, and to afford the best direction in the journey of life, and to guide his followers by the light of his truth, and the splendour of his example to the heavenly world,

world, will acknowledge that there is great propriety and beauty in describing him under this character. His apostles and ministers are, on the same account, described as lights of the world, since they were employed by him to dispense the truth which he had communicated. In like manner, they who contribute to preserve the gospel in the world, and to spread the influence of its salutary truth on the hearts and lives of their fellow-creatures, are justly considered as enlightening mankind.

It will be thought particular that the character of giving light belongs to those most properly, who discover things, which were before unknown, who clear up difficult truth, or give a more clear and satisfactory view of those truths which were before received and acknowledged. In this sense it will be easily admitted, that the character belongs to those more especially, who were employed in the first ages of the church, to declare the christian doctrine to such as were unacquainted with

with it: but that others also, even all who rightly understand the gospel, and live according to it, are, in an eminent sense, the lights of the world, will appear, if we attend to the following particulars.

First, Their very profession is in some sense holding forth the light, if the doctrines which they profess are agreeable to the original revelation; if they are careful to separate them from every thing of a different nature, and to receive such things alone as Christ has taught; if, on all occasions they have recourse to the written word, and take sincere pains to bring all their opinions to its standard, they will not only have light within themselves, but their doctrines will serve to enlighten the minds of all who converse with them. Hence, if one person has just and rational sentiments of the nature and design of religion, he is apt to diffuse the same among many others; his friends and acquaintance adopt them; they are propagated in the religious society to which he belongs; they are preserved to those

those who come after him, and the influence of them extends not only to the present, but to many succeeding generations.

The experience of the present age may be brought to confirm the truth of this observation. If we consider the state of religious knowledge in our own country in the times of Popish darkness, when so few had any free and generous sentiments on the subject, and those who did entertain them were under such strong temptations to keep them in their own breasts; and compare with it the knowledge we have, the freedom we enjoy, we shall see reason to confess our particular obligations to their wisdom who discovered their errors; to their courage who pointed them out, and to their resolution who have maintained the cause of religious liberty against all efforts, which have been made for its destruction. Though our thanks are first and chiefly due to God, who, by the methods of his providence, has ordered such a course of events as has been favourable

able to this most extraordinary revelation, yet, we shall see that the persons whom he has employed, as his instruments in bringing it about, are, in an eminent sense, the lights of our church, and that we owe very much to them for the just and rational sentiments on which we value ourselves.

The influence of their learning and knowledge, it is true, has been gradual; they did not themselves possibly perceive how far their principles might extend; they were ignorant of many truths which the industry of their successors has brought to light; and the splendour of freedom and inquiry, which now prevails, may have received considerable increase from many of a later date; yet it is to our first reformers, that we owe the dawning of this fair science, and they are their discoveries, enlarged and improved, which constitute the liberty and happiness which we possess.

If we trace things back through the several periods which have intervened
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from the time of the reformation to the present day, we may perceive the light has gradually opened upon men's minds, that the discoveries of one age have arisen out of those of the foregoing, and that scarcely a person of ingenuity has arisen, who has turned his thoughts to religious subjects, but he has held out the light to all who have followed him, and diffused his own sentiments, or paved the way for such as were wiser and better.

So true is it that persons of eminence and extraordinary knowledge are still, as they were in the beginning, the lights of the christian world. Nor are we to suppose, that the gospel is yet so perfectly understood as that there should not be room left for our inquiry and observation. If we implicitly adopt the opinions of our fathers, and determine to see no further than they have done, instead of affording us light they may be said to put out our eyes. If they had acted in the manner in which some would persuade us to act, instead of liberty and increasing

knowledge, we should have been in the grossest slavery and ignorance. It remains, that we still attentively consider what new treasures of knowledge we can draw from the sacred scriptures; what improvement we can make on the helps, which our fathers have afforded us, that we likewise may diffuse our light, and transmit our religion to our children with the greatest advantage for their use and improvement.

But especially they diffuse the light of the gospel in the truest sense, who are careful to live according to the rules of it. There is great beauty and advantage, doubtless, in the light, which they dispense, who are endued with great knowledge, and possess those ample treasures of science, which they faithfully dispense to their fellow-creatures around them. But the great end of knowledge is, to influence the heart and life; and no truth, however sacred, is of any importance any further than it tends to this purpose. As those, therefore, are the distinguished ornaments of

of the christian religion who live agreeably to it; so they hold forth the light in the truest and most useful sense to their fellow-creatures around them.

The light of their good example will be a most agreeable object to all, to whom it is presented. For they alone are consistent with themselves; they are the only persons, who can be thought sincere in the regard, which they profess to the gospel. For if any, whilst they call themselves by the name of Jesus, show no concern to depart from iniquity (though they should possess the wisdom and knowledge of the apostles themselves, and be able to place every doctrine of the gospel in the most agreeable light, and to recommend it by the most forcible reasons); we should say they were very inconsistent christians, or rather indeed we should be inclined to suppose that, on some account or other, it was convenient for them to assume the christian name, but that they had no regard to it in their hearts. If, on the other hand, whilst they profess to believe the

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gospel,

gospel, they live as becometh christians: if the virtues of temperance, charity and piety appear to reign in their hearts, and the good works, which flow from them, adorn their lives, all who converse with them will acknowledge it to be a most agreeable sight, and will confess that the light of the gospel itself enters their minds with a brighter lustre, when they have in this manner living instances before them of the power of its truth. None can reasonably question the sincerity of such christians. They give undoubted proofs that they believe as they profess, and the character, which they present, is consistent and beautiful in all its parts.

But, besides the pleasure which the contemplation of such characters must afford, it is attended with the most beneficial consequences. The example of an inconsistent, wicked christian, is apt to infect many others. The conduct of those, on whom so many eyes are fixed, must, insensibly, have a very extensive influence. As it is justly expected, that they should
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practise the virtues, which their religion recommends ; if they disappoint men in this respect, they will suspect the truth of their principles, or conclude that the vices, which they practise, have not so much malignity in them as they had been used to imagine. In consequence of this, they will either renounce their principles, or show the same remissness, which they observe in others of the christian name. The examples of vice are generally dangerous to all who observe them. It is seldom that any vicious act can be committed, but some or other will be inclined to imitate it. Even the persons, who have a great abhorrence for any sin, by the frequent sight and familiar conversation of those, who are infected with it, grow to have less aversion for it, begin to look on it with complacence, and at length proceed to practise it with greediness. But the influence of their conduct depends much on their character in other respects ; and of all characters, theirs who make profession of the

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christian religion, is of most dangerous example.

Other sinners we only learn to imitate in the particular vices, to which they are addicted. Thus, a person will not become intemperate from the conversation of the covetous; nor be encouraged to any act of injustice or oppression, from the instances of profaneness to which he is witness. But, if a christian, who professes to observe the religion of Jesus, and to govern himself by his authority and example, be addicted to any vice, it gives encouragement to those who know him, to practise other vices. All sins, they will say, are equally forbidden by the christian religion, and if he follows his inclinations in one, we may in another. He is a person, from whom better things may be expected: and if his principles are not sufficient to restrain his appetites and passions, and to form him to a consistent character of virtue and piety, why should this be expected from us; why may not we indulge ourselves as we please in
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the gratification of our favourite inclinations?

But, in the same degree in which the ill conduct of christians is dangerous and hurtful, their wise and consistent behaviour is highly salutary. Their meekness under provocation; their lenity when injured; their temperance amidst the incitements to pleasure; their concern after the example of Jesus to bless mankind; and the benevolent useful character, which they possess, are so many instructive lessons in virtue, and beyond the best discourses which can be delivered, are effectual to reform and improve the world.

By the light of such examples men not only discover their duty, but learn to practise it. They are convinced by their own observation, how reasonable, and how amiable the practice of virtue is: they are curious to inquire, from what principle such amiable dispositions proceed, and by what motives the inconstancy of the

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human

human will is thus fixed to one steady, uniform character, and naturally desire to govern themselves by the same.

If then it be the character of the present or any other age, that, whilst the principles of the christian religion are better understood, the duties of it are practised with less care; we may venture to determine that the lustre of it will be more sullied by the vices of its professors, than promoted by their reasonings. If it be true, as has been often asserted, that they, who receive the freest and most generous principles, take greater liberties than others in their conduct; whatever they may think of themselves, they occasion the greatest reflections on their profession, and are in a fair way of bringing it into universal contempt. Those who, with unfair views, and less knowledge, walk in the light of the gospel, in a circumspect, regular and exemplary manner, will do it real honour, and bid fair to make it what it is intended to be, a blessing to mankind. It matters little that their
sentiments

sentiments on controverted subjects are liable to some objections ; that they follow not the most perfect standard in observing the institutions of the christian religion ; whilst they have those virtues which the faith and worship of christians are intended to produce, they have what will compensate for all their defects, and above all things give a lustre and use to their example.

The second thing to be considered from the words is, how they who behave so, will engage others to glorify their Father in heaven. The first and most obvious sense of glorifying God is ascribing praises to him, or giving unto him the glory of his perfections. Beside this, it sometimes signifies the thanks which we pay for particular mercies. The acknowledgment of sin is likewise spoken of as giving glory to God. Especially reformation and new obedience, or a course of virtue and piety, are, in the highest sense of all, giving glory to God. In a word, whatever tends to illustrate the divine perfections, or, to promote

promote the virtue and happiness of mankind, may be spoken of as glorifying God.

When, therefore, it is urged upon us as an argument to a worthier temper and character, that others, seeing our good works, may be engaged to glorify our Father in heaven; the meaning of it must be, that they, by our example, may be prevailed upon to practise those good works, which, in the most eminent sense, conduce to his glory, who hath required them from us. That the just and rational sentiments of those, who profess the gospel, and especially their sober and virtuous conversation will be most conducive to this end, is sufficiently obvious from what has been said already on the subject.

It only remains, that those, who receive the gospel, may be prevailed upon to consider these things, and attain to the discharge of those duties.

It may be convenient in the third place, to consider, what those good works are, which

which may be thought most likely to produce this effect. The most general notion of them is, that they are such acts of virtue and obedience, as the precepts and examples of the New Testament recommend to our particular attention. The whole of the christian law is comprehended by Jesus in these two precepts; "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with
"all thy heart, with all thy soul, and
"with all thy mind; and thou shalt love
"thy neighbour as thyself." Whatever expression, therefore, of piety to God; whatever instance of justice and charity to men justly appear to be included in these two precepts, are to be reckoned in the number of those good works, by which we are to adorn our religion, and to give a good example to our fellow-creatures around us. But the expression of good works will, in a particular manner, direct our attention to those actions, by which we may do good to mankind. For, as the best notion of a good man is, that he employs his constant endeavours to do good; so, for the same reason, good
works

works are such, as are generally and publicly useful.

The human character, I acknowledge, will be very incomplete without piety to God. He, who is wholly destitute of reverence or love for the Supreme Being, is not only unqualified for all charitable offices to mankind, but prepared for the perpetration of the greatest crimes. Yet how are we to express our piety to heaven, but by such exercises as are usually called religious. I see not how they can deserve the character of piety, who wholly omit, or negligently perform their public and private devotions. It is also a great instance of piety to resign ourselves to the will of God, and to embrace, with satisfaction, whatever he appoints. A pious man has a full persuasion of the equity and benevolence of the divine administration. Whatever particular events may be ordained for himself, he endeavours to acquiesce and rejoice in them, as a proof of that order which prevails through the works of God, and is conducive to the good of the whole.

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But the chief part of piety certainly is to imitate the divine example, and to bring ourselves to as near a resemblance as we are able to the unspotted holiness, the unchangeable righteousness, the diffusive goodness, and the everlasting mercy of the Father of all. As the scheme of the Supreme Being apparently tends to the happiness of his creatures, the highest expression of piety which we can give, is to employ our sincere, undwearied endeavours for the good of mankind. So that the good works to which we should chiefly attend, will appear to be, what they have been just described, those which have the nearest and most intimate connection with the happiness of our fellow-creatures.

The sacred writers, largely as they insist on the love of God and the offices of piety which flow from it, treat all pretension to the love of God as vain and hypocritical, if they are not attended with the love of our neighbour. Thus the apostle John (1 John iv. 20.) “ if a man
“ say

“ say I love God and hateth his brother,
“ he is a liar; for he that loveth not his
“ brother, whom he hath seen, how can
“ he love God whom he hath not seen.”
And in the next verse; “ and this com-
“ mandment have we from him, that he
“ who loveth God loveth his brother
“ also.”

Who, that consider with what an unspeakable charm the offices of kindness and compassion to our brother enter the hearts of those who observe them, will not acknowledge that these are most effectual to recommend our religious profession, and to engage the imitation of those who are witnesses to them? The veneration and love of God are, doubtless, great and noble qualities, and conduce in a very high degree to the perfection and happiness of those, who entertain them. But it requires some reflection, thoroughly to comprehend their true nature; and a greater elevation of mind than many possess, to have just notions of their excellency. The dignity of a rational creature cannot be perceived, nor the true enjoyment

ment of life attained without a strict and steady self-government; and those, who have acquired this authority have more real excellence than all the possessions which princes or even emperors of the world could procure them. Yet they are virtues of so severe a cast, that they rather excite our admiration than win our hearts. Though the persons who practise them find, that they are accompanied with unspeakable satisfaction, yet those who observe them have not often any just conception of their excellency.

But the acts of compassion, forgiveness, and universal charity, have a beauty, which every eye perceives. Those who experience the effects of them, can hardly fail loving the persons in whom they reside. All good men think themselves happy in the opportunities, which they have of practising them, and those who cannot be persuaded to act the benevolent part themselves, yet esteem and love those who do.

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By these chiefly, then, though not without the other virtues which have been mentioned, we should approve ourselves the ornament of the gospel, and endeavour to shine as lights of the world, that we may engage the imitation of all around us.

PART II.

It is obvious, that a man may be a sincere christian, who yet wants those graces, which give a peculiar lustre to the christian conversation, so as to make it conspicuous in the eyes of the world, and render it the object of their affection and imitation.

Some, from their obscure station, want the opportunity of making their virtues conspicuous; they are seldom called upon to act in the view of many spectators. Their circumstances, or ability, confine them within a narrow circle; and whatever

ever virtues they may possess, they have few opportunities of exercising them, and none but their particular companions and intimates are acquainted with the merit of their characters. Others, from humility or a natural reserve, are studious of retirement, or little concerned to show themselves to the world. They are not aware what good they might do by the open display of the good dispositions by which they are governed, and by the public exercise of the amiable affections which reign in their hearts. Thus they pass their life unknown; the light of their virtues is undiscovered, and their fellow-creatures, as they did not perceive their splendour whilst they were in the world, scarcely miss them when they are gone. The characters of other good men, who yet appear in the world are marked by virtues of a less amiable cast. Their known hatred of vice, causes them to animadvert upon all the instances of it with great severity. The strict integrity which they maintain, and the high sense which they have of the obligations of

justice, and the dictates of conscience, command them frequently to review the faults of others with the appearance of harshness, and will not suffer them to make a proper allowance for the infirmities of those, who are not so excellent as themselves. They are frequently called out not only to blame, but punish the injustice of others: and thus, though they may gain the reverence, they will not engage the affection of beholders, or diffuse the light around them which the milder and more amiable virtues of compassion and beneficence are found to diffuse. It is often true also that persons, who appear to be eminent for their piety, and distinguished by their zeal for the christian religion, make themselves less amiable by the freedom with which they censure the failings of others, and sometimes express so much hatred to the vices of bad men, that they can hardly be thought to have any remaining affection for their persons. In all these characters we may find something to admire, and their failings, if they are indeed so, must be

be allowed to be the failings of good men; but it will be granted that they want the recommendations, which candour and humanity give to all those who are possessed of them. More good nature, it is true, and even beneficence itself, without the other moral virtues, are extremely deficient: and were it possible that a person could be a real friend to mankind without religion, and the love of God, we should think his character wanted its chief excellence: but still, the love of God, and the love of men, when united in the same person, appear most amiable and ornamental; and, as they reflect a lustre on each other, they throw a light on a man's life and character, which engage the love and encourage the imitation of all who are witnesses to it.

Then only will your light shine before men, when your piety is set off by an easy cheerfulness, and streams forth in those acts of kindness which serve to please and bless mankind. The pious man, when he is what he ought to be, a

man of generous diffusive goodness; when he carefully copies the divine benignity and mercy, and, like Jesus Christ, the author of our holy religion, goes about doing good; when his pious and benevolent actions are accompanied with unaffected cheerfulness, and flow from the heart dilated with communicating what he has received, is, in the truest sense, the light of the world, and shines as the sun in the kingdom of the benevolent Father of all. The motives to such a character and conduct may be drawn,

1. From the consideration of our nature as rational, social creatures. It needs but little reflection to perceive that we were made for something higher than the enjoyment of the animal life alone; that the exercise of reason, the improvement of the understanding, the search after truth, and the pursuit of knowledge, should engage much of our attention; and that we depart from the true and proper end of our being, if we are only concerned about what we should eat, and what

what we should drink, and the like. It is no less evident that we are not designed to live to ourselves alone; that we are obliged to seek the good of others as well as our particular and private good; that it cannot be a matter of indifference whether we lead an indolent or an active life; whether we confine all our views to our own gratification, or keep an eye on the interests of others also; and whether the example which we set, be unprofitable and dangerous, or such as will induce our fellow beings to an upright, worthy, pious conduct. It was a saying, received with the highest applause in the heathen world, "I am a man, and think nothing humane and friendly foreign to me." Hence the light of reason alone will direct to such an exertion of our faculties, as may most effectually conduce to the benefit of our fellow men.

2. If we farther consider ourselves as the creatures of God, as placed by him in such and such particular stations, and with a design which he has with suffi-

cient plainness intimated to us, we should acknowledge ourselves under a yet higher obligation to act agreeably to the relation in which we stand. The Being who made us, has given us a law, teaching us for what we were made, and in what we ought to employ ourselves. He has shown us that to do justly, and to love mercy, as well as to walk humbly with him, are not only branches of duty, to which he requires our attention, but, in the highest sense, good for us. Hence we cannot attain our true and perfect happiness, if we live in the neglect of them. The works of God, and especially the acts of his providence, plainly show it to be the will of God, that we study to make ourselves useful in the world, and to give all the recommendation in our power to the benevolent course of life which we follow. The great God, whose creatures and subjects we are, has shown that it is his will that we study to do good to one another by his own benevolent works, the chief object of which is, to promote the happiness of his creatures. The course of his

his providence represents him to us as the Father of mankind, and so obliges us to consider every man as a brother, and to receive and entertain him with the affection which this relation requires. We are all the members of one great family, of which he is the head, and are thus directed to every pursuit, by which the order and happiness of it may be promoted. The government, which God exercises over his creatures and children, is evidently moral. The happiness which he designs them is in consequence of their obedience to his commands, which teach us in what way we should chiefly endeavour to be useful to mankind, namely, by directing and exhorting to all good works, and by maintaining such an exemplary conduct ourselves, as may afford the most useful instruction, or, to allude to the words of our text, by holding forth a light which they may behold with pleasure, and follow with the greatest advantage. It is then the law of pure and uncorrupted nature, and the law of God, that we attend to all the offices of charity,

and study to do all the good in our power whilst we are continued in the world.

3. I would lead you farther to consider yourselves as the subjects of the Redeemer's kingdom, the laws of which plainly oblige us to the same useful exemplary conduct. The great design of the appearance of Jesus Christ in the world, was to bring men back to the authority of God which they had renounced, and to reconcile them to that goodness which they had neglected and abused. A more benevolent design, a design more agreeable to the love and goodness of God in all his works, cannot well be conceived. For the extension of this merciful design of God our Father was Jesus Christ raised up, and the excellent doctrine which he taught, and the useful life which he led, showed that the spirit of his religion was love. He has made it the badge of his disciples, that they have love one to another. He spent his life in the highest exercise of charity, and closed it with the same sentiments,

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by which the whole of it was governed; with a concern for the everlasting happiness of his followers; with a generous compassion to his enemies, directing his disciples to begin their work of carrying his gospel through the world by publishing its mercies first of all at Jerusalem; and, with a fervent prayer for their forgiveness, who with cruel malice imbrued their hands in his blood. To the other characters of the benevolence of Jesus, these may be added, that it had all the recommending ornaments of an invincible meekness, a sedate cheerfulness, and a candour which thought no evil. So that it did more especially give a pleasing, useful light. All these particulars taken together, so strongly recommend the same spirit to his disciples that there needs not any farther enlargement.

4. I would recommend it to you to seek this ornament of your profession and character, as members of distinct and separate societies, who dissent from the established forms that you may worship
in

in a manner more agreeable to the dictates of your own consciences. If this proceed from a contentious principle, from affectation of singularity, or merely from the prejudices of education, it is unjustifiable and criminal thus to leave the assembly of your fellow-christians, and so to contribute to that alienation of affection which different opinions, and different observances are so apt to occasion. But, if it proceed from a full persuasion, that the method of worship which you have chosen, is most agreeable to the word of God, and most conducive to the great ends of worship; if it be conscience which prompts you to it, let it appear that you make a conscience of what you say and do in every other particular; take care how you give occasion to the reproach that your zeal is wholly employed about your own particular opinions and forms, that you are strict indeed in observing the externals of religion; but that this is all, that you are very indifferent about the more substantial fruits of a religious principle. What I would re-commend

commend to you is, a uniform concern to fulfil your christian obligation, a constant care to do every thing which justice prescribes, and, beside the demands of justice, to seek the convenience and comfort of those with whom you associate. That your character may want none of the requisites to its perfection and beauty, let it be your concern to acquire the more perfect command of all your inclinations and desires, and to pass through the duties of your several stations with easy cheerfulness and good humour, with a constant desire to please and to be pleased, which, as it will give a great ornament to your civil character, will be no mean recommendation of your religious one. From these several topics would I argue with you in favour of that christian temper and conversation, which it is the design of this discourse to recommend. My meaning in a few words is, that we should endeavour to conciliate the esteem and affection of others, and to provoke them to all good works by a care, not only to abound in that which is good, but to seek

seek the most agreeable and becoming manner of performing the duties in which we are engaged. To persuade you to this, I have distinctly considered it as agreeable to the nature which God has given us, and as a main part of the law under which he has brought us. It is most agreeable to our general profession as christians, and will be the best recommendation of our profession as members of distinct and separate societies. Whether, therefore, we regard the good of others, or our own credit; whether we consider the dictates of nature, or the law and word of God, we shall see on all sides our obligation to diffuse our light among men by good works. Our zeal for particular modes of faith or forms of worship, it is readily allowed, may be easily carried to an extreme. We have frequent opportunities of observing persons more zealous about their particular sentiments and manners of expression than for our common christianity. But, if we take the method which is prescribed, and are careful to adorn our profession by our good and useful

useful actions, there is no danger of any such excess. It may, however, not be unnecessary to enumerate some more particular cautions and directions on this subject, with which I shall conclude the present discourse.

The first is, that we should guard against a vain and ostentatious display of our virtues. This is the more necessary to be insisted upon, as the motives, by which you have been urged to this useful and ornamental conduct, may seem to encourage a splendid and vain-glorious appearance of virtue rather than the reality. In performing good works we should, doubtless, have a higher end than to gain a name, and to pass ourselves upon the world for men of extraordinary characters. For though no man can or ought to be indifferent to the opinion which his fellow-creatures have of him, and to the appearance which he makes in their eyes, yet, if he have not a higher principle of justice, it is to be feared it will fail him when put to the trial, and then, by confining his

his attention to the praise of men, he will miss the reward which good men may expect from their Father in heaven. Beside, if men see that we are fond of displaying ourselves, and that we practise good works only to raise a character, they will naturally conclude that our virtue is only in appearance; and thus, instead of affording them a good example, and encouraging them to follow us, we shall incur their neglect or contempt, and, perhaps, lead them to conclude, there is no such thing as true goodness in the world. The light of a good example will shine the brightest, and have the most beneficial consequences, when the person himself is least sensible of his virtues; when he goes on from one good deed to another, in a steady course, without appearing to expect, or discovering a solicitude about, the esteem and admiration of those who follow him.

We may be confident, from the meek and humble character of Jesus, and from the effectual measures which he has taken

to check the pride of his disciples, that this precept may be understood, so as to consist with the caution before insisted upon. We are not indeed to be ashamed of our virtuous and religious principles. If we are called upon to act in the view of our fellow-creatures, we should let them see that we esteem it our highest honour to be regarded as the faithful servants of God, and that we desire in all circumstances to maintain a useful, exemplary conduct; but it should be our concern at the same time that a regard to man be not our only, or our chief principle. If there be any who will call this ostentation, since the persecution of calumny, as well as the other kinds of it, is, sometimes, the lot of the best of men, the fault is entirely theirs, and our own conscience will easily acquit us.

2. Another rule is, that we be careful in fixing the nature of our goodness, and discerning what those actions are which deserve the name of good works. The opinion of the multitude will afford but a very

very uncertain rule for distinguishing good and evil. There are persons of a compliant disposition, who can resist no importunity, who yield to every proposal which is made to them, and, on this account, are sometimes preferred to persons of a steady inflexible virtue. In the course of a good life, it is frequently necessary to go contrary to the sense of those about us, to do what may forfeit their good opinion, yea incur their displeasure. Now we are not so to seek their applause as to act contrary to what we are in our own minds persuaded is right and fit. Our light must shine before them, not by complying with all their humours, much less by flattering their vices or follies; but by a steady adherence to truth and righteousness, and an active concern to do all the good in our power. These are good works, which have the most direct tendency to make our fellow-creatures wise, virtuous and happy. And those persons who excel in them hold out the fairest example to copy after, and are the most likely to engage men to glorify

rify their Father in heaven, who abound the most in this. Our own consciences will tell us, if we make a fair appeal to them, what we are to do, and what we are to avoid; and the holy scriptures will afford very good assistance, by the precepts which they contain, and the examples which they give, and particularly by his perfect example who went about doing good.

To conclude; Let it be our highest ambition to approve ourselves to God, as sincerely desirous of pleasing and honouring him; as really concerned that true religion may prevail, that God's name may be glorified, and our fellow-creatures raised to all the happiness which they are capable of attaining. This will be an effectual, prevailing motive to diffuse our light, and will not suffer us to desert the station in which the providence of God has placed us, with a view of pleasing him better by any of the duties of a private contemplative life. This

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will teach us that we please God best when we study most to resemble him; and that by active services here below, we may hope to prepare ourselves for stations of more conspicuous usefulness in the future world.

which they give, and particularly by his private example who went about doing good.

To conclude: Let it be our highest ambition to approve ourselves to God as sincere servants of blessing and not as hypocrites, as really concerned that his religion may prevail, that God's name may be glorified, and our fellow creatures raised to all the happiness which they are capable of attaining. This will be an effectual, prevailing motive to direct our light, and will not suffer us to forget the station in which the providence of God has placed us, with a view of blessing him better by any of the duties of a private Christian life. This will

SERMON

SERMON VI.

On the Testimony of the Spirit.

JOHN xv. 26, 27.

BUT WHEN THE COMFORTER IS COME, WHOM I
WILL SEND UNTO YOU FROM THE FATHER, EVEN
THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, WHICH PROCEEDETH
FROM THE FATHER, HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME;
AND YE ALSO SHALL BEAR WITNESS, BECAUSE
YE HAVE BEEN WITH ME FROM THE BEGINNING.

IF any one can read the history of our
blessed Saviour without discovering the
traces of a great and excellent character,
I should suspect, either that he had paid
very little attention to it, or that he was
a very indifferent judge of those qualities
which are most worthy of esteem and ve-

neration. I have often considered the character which the sacred historians have given of Jesus as carrying in it the strongest presumption of the truth and genuineness of the history. His conduct is so far above the common standard of human nature, and so much excels every thing which we meet with in history or fiction, that one may justly question whether it could ever have entered into the mind of man to conceive of any thing so excellent, if he had not had the original before his eyes. Or, if he had formed the design of exhibiting a character entirely blameless, consistent in all its parts, and adorned with every grace and virtue, whatever his genius might be, I will venture to say that he would have failed in his purpose, and found, upon trial, that he was incapable of carrying it into execution.

And yet this the sacred historians have done, without the assistance of learning, or any extraordinary abilities, and in a work where it does not appear to have been

been the least part of their design to give a finished or high character, but solely to record, with that simplicity of language and sentiment for which their writings are distinguished, certain facts, concerning which they declare, either that they were themselves the witnesses of them, or that they received them from those who were.

Whence is it, then, that these plain, illiterate men have, in fact, done what the greatest geniuses have not been able to accomplish, and even when they did not profess or appear to intend any such thing? Whence can it be, but that they faithfully related what they saw and heard? By thus recording the actions, and delivering the discourses of Jesus, have they not in fact shown to the world that standard of perfect virtue which is to be met with no where else? Whatever part of our Saviour's character we consider, we still find reason to admire and honour him. Scarcely can we read the smallest portion of the history of his

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life,

life, without adopting the exclamation of the centurion who was appointed to attend at his crucifixion, "surely this was a righteous person." Whether we view him in the early parts of his life, or when he had arrived to years of maturity; when he was with his disciples in private, or when he spoke and acted in the presence of the multitude, we discover the same propriety of sentiment and behaviour, the same lovely proofs of his excellent spirit. It is remarkable too, that the strict integrity and benevolence with which he entered on his ministry continued with him through the whole course of it, and accompanied him to the end of his life. But the behaviour of Jesus near the close of his ministry, and especially at his death, has generally been thought the most shining part of it. In this period, his obedience to God and his love to the sons of men shone most conspicuous. Here he gave the most illustrious example of the virtues which his disciples were to imitate in all succeeding ages. Here, more especially, he discovered

covered that merit in consequence of which he was exalted to his kingdom, and made the author of eternal salvation.

The discourse, of which the text is a part, is itself no mean proof of the greatness of mind which our Saviour possessed, and of the integrity and benevolence which he discovered, as would appear, if we had time to go through the several parts of it. But, though I decline this on the present occasion, I shall just hint at the subjects on which it chiefly turns, or which are most observable in it. Such are, the sense which he maintains of the dignity of his own character, and of the fidelity and diligence with which he had discharged the duties of his high office; the concern which he expresses to form, in the minds of his disciples, the same regard to his instructions and authority which he had shown to those of his Father; and, in particular, his desire to produce that friendly regard to each other, which, whilst it made them a firm and united body, would con-

duce to their highest enjoyment. We may observe, likewise, the tender care which he expresses to abate the grief which his speedy departure would occasion, and the consolation which he encourages them to draw from their future success in preaching his religion. He does not, however, conceal the persecutions to which they would be exposed in the faithful discharge of their duty, and plainly intimates that they were not to avoid them by dissimulation, but bravely to endure them, and seek for their reward in the satisfaction of their own minds, and in the approbation of almighty God.

But, beside the general arguments which he offers for their support and consolation in their future trials, he promises them the presence and assistance of the holy spirit, whom he describes as the comforter whom he would send from the Father. And he describes it in my text as one great part of his office, to testify of him, or to give those testimonies

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to the character and mission of Jesus which might serve to prove, beyond all contradiction, that he was the messenger of his Father, and was raised up by him to do the works which he had appointed.

It is well known to all, who are acquainted with the history of christianity; what disputes there have been, even among christians, about the nature, offices and character of the Son and of the Spirit of God. But they contain no real reflection on the cause of true christianity: for they had certainly never arisen, if divines could have contented themselves with that simplicity of expression, in which the sacred writers appear to delight. They did not write to please a wild and roving imagination, or to gratify a busy curiosity, but to establish the most necessary and useful truths in such a manner as might gain the assent of mankind, and engage them to act at all times under the influence of them. They plainly avoided entering into those questions which have since exercised the wits of men, to the great

great disgrace and prejudice of the christian cause, and particularly of the interests of charity and mutual forbearance.

With regard to the subject of the present discourse, the comforter, the spirit of truth, the holy spirit of God, it is very usual with the sacred writers to attribute the extraordinary events which respect the rise and propagation of the christian religion to his agency. These, many have thought, they only intended as other forms of expression for the power and energy of God. Whilst others have contended, that we are to understand them of a distinct personal agent, and have been at great pains to explain his nature and manner of existence, with all the particulars of his character and office.

Which of these is the true opinion, is a matter of little consequence, and it seems no way essential to the character and influence of the christian cause to bring the matter to

an absolute determination. Those who will consider the genius of eastern languages, and the fondness which the writers in them discover for bold and new metaphors, will not think it so strange that they should give all the characters of person to the description, when they only meant to express a particular divine attribute and manner of operation. And the credibility of this opinion increases by the difficulty which they have found in determining to what class of beings, or to what rank the holy spirit should be referred. Some have represented him as one with the Father and the Son, and in terms which it is difficult, at least, to reconcile to the great fundamental doctrine of religion, **THERE IS BUT ONE GOD.** Others have contended, that he is an inferior and subordinate agent, employed by the Father of all to execute a certain office in the redemption and salvation of mankind.

If we imagine that the scriptures intend something more than a property
or

or attribute of the Father, and that they discover to us the existence of a person, who has a peculiar and distinct office in the kingdom of God; though we may be thought to have observed less carefully the scripture manner of expression, and to embrace a scheme which is attended with some peculiar difficulties; yet, whilst we acknowledge that he acted either in union with, or under the direction, and by the authority, of the supreme Being, the Father of all, we shall be equally obliged to pay our unfeigned thanks to God for his operation, and for the gifts and powers which are communicated to the children of men by his means. And we shall, with the highest justice, refer every thing ultimately to the great Being who is supreme in all worlds, from whom all other beings derive their power, and in whom they all exist.

If any of you should expect me to declare my own sentiments more plainly on this subject, I answer, it can signify nothing to the merits of the cause what they

they are. Let the matter be fairly considered on both sides, and let us adhere to that which seems most reasonable. But, lest my reserve on such subjects should be ill understood, I will add to what has been said, that, when I consider how agreeable it is to the course and order of his providence for the eternal God to make use of inferior and subordinate agents in accomplishing his purposes, and in what manner the writers of the New Testament give to the Spirit of God the characters of a distinct person, I am almost inclined to suppose, that this may be the case. But, when I consider again, how agreeable it is to their genius and manner of writing to represent characters and attributes as persons, and the many expressions interspersed in their writings which speak of him as the same being with the supreme God, and ascribe to him his peculiar perfections and acts of government, the former evidence vanishes, and I acquiesce in their sentiments who, by the Spirit of God, understand the power and energy of the Father of all.

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But, leaving this, which some of you may perhaps be inclined to think an unprofitable speculation; the testimony which is given by the spirit of God to the character of Jesus, and the truth of the christian religion, which is the subject I propose at present to consider, will not be affected by any such speculations. For, whether it be the immediate act of God himself, or the intervention of any other being be acknowledged, still it will afford an undeniable proof that the christian religion is of God, and will recommend its great truths to our cordial and grateful acceptance and diligent improvement.

In order to do justice to the subject of the present discourse, I shall first take some account of the extraordinary gifts and powers which the apostles and first preachers of the gospel received from the spirit of God; and then state the argument which may be drawn from it for the divine mission of our Saviour. And for the first part, I shall first represent the effects which this extraordinary manifestation

tation of the spirit of God had on the minds of the apostles and first preachers of the christian religion. It must appear a very extraordinary thing, to every intelligent person, that these men should, on a sudden, possess such a degree of fortitude, as to stand up, in the most open and public manner, the advocates of a despised and persecuted cause. Whilst their master lived, we do not find that their courage was ever much put to the trial. Jesus himself was the chief object of the malice and resentment of those who were the enemies of his religion. Or, if they were at any time exposed, they prudently retired from the storm of persecution. But, when he was apprehended, it was evident, how little they were capable themselves to face danger, and encounter the opposition of those who sought the life of Jesus. They appear to have had a sincere affection for their master, they made the warmest professions of their inviolable attachment to his interest; but, as soon as there was the least appearance that his

enemies

enemies were likely to prevail against him, they all forsook him and fled. And, a little afterwards, one of them who recovered himself so far as to follow him to the house of the high priest, whither he was led to take his trial, only did it to increase his shame. For, as soon as he was charged with being a disciple of Jesus, he grossly and repeatedly denied him. To what, then, can it be imputed, that these very persons, a few weeks after, should have the courage and resolution to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of this same Jesus? should even charge their own rulers with being his betrayers and murderers? should declare their full persuasion that, though he was permitted to fall by the malice of his opposers, yet, he was raised from the dead by the power of God, and was invested with such high authority, that it was the interest and duty of all to pay a willing subjection to him, to govern themselves by his laws, and to wait for his second appearance; when he should come, as their prince, to call his enemies to an account, and to reward

reward the humble virtue and patient hope of his faithful followers.

Such a change as this, produced in so short a time, on the minds of these men, must have had some cause equal to the effect; and there appears none so probable, as that which the sacred writers lead us to assign, that they were not only in an extraordinary manner convinced of the truth of the doctrine which they were commissioned to preach, but had likewise such a degree of firmness and resolution imparted to them, as made them superior to the fear of any evil which the most powerful of their enemies could inflict. The death of their master, it is plain, had greatly disheartened them; and, though the proofs of his resurrection a little revived their hope, yet it does not appear that these had any such effect upon them as to make them the bold, resolute assertors of the truth which they afterwards became. And there is not any the least appearance of impropriety in the supposition, that, by an extraor-

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dinary impulse of the Deity upon their minds, which the scriptures express by the agency of his spirit, they were raised to an uncommon pitch of fortitude. Hence proceeded that boldness of speech which they used in declaring the truths of the christian religion. On this account the undaunted spirit which they discovered, when threatened and persecuted, is spoken of as a distinct gift which they received on the memorable day of Pentecost.

I proceed to consider the change made in their opinions or apprehensions of things. They appear, from the first, to have been men of great simplicity and honesty, and, from their station in life, to have had no contemptible share of understanding; but they laboured under the same prejudices with the rest of their countrymen: they were full of the notion, that the Messiah was to be a temporal prince, and that they should be the first ministers of that kingdom which he was to set up. Though they were sincere,

heartly

heartly friends to virtue and goodness, and plainly expected a general reformation of manners, by means of the doctrine of Jesus, and considered repentance and amendment of life in all wicked persons as an essential qualification for a place in his kingdom; yet, they thought that he was to set himself at the head of the Jewish nation, to deliver them from the oppression of the Roman yoke, under which they groaned, and make them the first of the nations. They thought, doubtless, the kingdom of the Messiah would be a kingdom of righteousness; but, at the same time, that it would be attended with the exercise of worldly power and dominion, that Jesus would sit upon the throne of his father David, and make the city of Jerusalem the seat of universal monarchy. Many of the discourses of Jesus seem to be leveled at this notion: he expressly foretold his own sufferings and death at several different times; he warned his followers to expect persecution; taught them that the kingdom of God was of an internal and spiritual nature;

ture; that the chief persons in it should be those who were most humble and self-denying; and that they must enter into it through much tribulation. And yet, all these things were not sufficient to disentangle their minds from the notions which they had formed, or to enable them to shake off their prejudices. He upbraided them with the slowness of their apprehensions, and plainly intimated that they entirely mistook the design of his appearance: but yet, all this did not bring them to juster sentiments. His death they considered as the end of all their hopes. They had expected, indeed, that he should have been the deliverer of Israel, but being now, as they imagined, unable to save himself, they could see no prospect of any other deliverance which he should work out for them. When he appeared among them again, after his resurrection, they revived the same notion and entertained the same fond expectation. When he led them out of Jerusalem to be witnesses of his ascension, they thought he was going to assume the power
with

with which they expected to see him invested, and put this question to him, "wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

But, presently after, they are plainly of different sentiments; they speak of christianity as persons well acquainted with its nature, design and tendency; they see plainly that it was agreeable to the intention of Providence, that Jesus Christ should pass through a scene of sufferings; that his disciples and followers should be in the power of their enemies, and regard their present sufferings as the means of their future glory. They are, on a sudden, qualified to preach the chief doctrines of the christian religion; to lay the proofs of them before others in all their force and evidence; to explain the scripture prophecies; to show the connection of all God's dispensations; and to discover such grand events, though still future, as concerned the universal prevalence of the christian religion.

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It is not so easy to tell in what manner, or by what steps they attained to that high degree of knowledge which their preachings and writings discover; but it should seem that such things were discovered to them as their present circumstances required. Those who were to preach to the Jews; for instance, were qualified for this part of their office; and, when they were called to address themselves to the Gentiles, they were more particularly instructed in the terms on which they were to be admitted into the christian church. Those in a lower office had fewer gifts, and of an inferior kind; and the most and highest were bestowed upon such as were appointed for the highest stations. This is agreeable to the account which the apostle Paul gives in 1 Cor. ch. xii. verses 8, 11, 28. "To one is given by the spirit, the word of wisdom; to another, the word of knowledge by the same spirit," &c. And then he concludes the enumeration at the eleventh verse by asserting, that they all proceeded from the same spirit. And in
verse

verse twenty-eighth we have an account of the several officers in the christian church, to whom these gifts were severally imparted : "and God hath set some "in the church, first apostles, secondly "prophets," &c. All these lights conveyed to the understandings of mortal men, and especially of such men, in whom one should least of all expect to find any uncommon degree of wisdom and knowledge, must afford an undoubted argument of such extraordinary communications from the Father of lights; and is in perfect consistency with the fact which we are now considering, that they were indued with his holy spirit.

It is further remarkable, that this knowledge, which they had in so extraordinary a manner received, they were enabled to communicate to others in languages which they had never learned. It would have been impossible that the christian religion should have been carried into so many distant countries in so short a space of time, if the preachers of it must

have been first of all obliged, by the use of ordinary means, to learn the languages of the different persons to whom they were to address themselves. But this deficiency is happily provided against by the method here referred to. At the same time that they learned the doctrine which they were to impart, they were qualified to deliver it, in their respective languages, to the several persons to whom they were sent to preach. Thus they avoided the fatigue and loss of time which it must have occasioned to make themselves masters of so many different kinds of speech, and carried along with them, in this very gift, a strong presumption of the divine original of the doctrines which they taught.

This, as well as other particulars mentioned under this head, must proceed from divine teaching. It is reckoned a very remarkable thing, if a man, by long use and practice, make himself master of two or three different languages, so as to speak them with ease and fluency, and to express

express himself in them upon different kinds of subjects. It must, then, be acknowledged a most extraordinary thing, and what cannot be accounted for by any human means, that the ministers of Jesus, who most of them probably had no knowledge of any language but their own, should, at once, be masters of so many different kinds of tongues as they had occasion to use. This gift of tongues, as it is called, though it appeared most remarkable on the day of Pentecost, was continued in the church for some years. It appears from the two epistles to the Corinthians, that it had been received by several of the members of the churches, and that some of them used it merely for ostentation. But there can be no doubt whether they received it or not.

The apostle's authority was disputed among them. There was a party who opposed him, so that it cannot be imagined that he would have appealed to them, as to gifts which they possessed, and which, as he declares, they received from

from his hands, if the fact itself was not beyond all reasonable contradiction.

From these extraordinary qualifications which these first christians had for preaching the gospel, it is natural to conclude, that the accounts which have been transmitted of the christian doctrine through their hands, may be safely depended upon: and, in particular, that those christian institutions which they have recommended, under the authority of Jesus, should be diligently and conscientiously observed. This is the authority which we have for our christian assemblies for religious worship, and for observing the ordinances of the gospel. And, where they have seen fit to point out to us the use and design of any particular institution, it is obviously our duty to consider it in that particular light.

SERMON

S E R M O N VII.

On the Testimony of the Apostles.

JOHN xv. 26, 27.

BUT WHEN THE COMFORTER IS COME, WHOM I
WILL SEND UNTO YOU FROM THE FATHER, EVEN
THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH, WHICH PROCEEDETH
FROM THE FATHER, HE SHALL TESTIFY OF ME;
AND YE ALSO SHALL BEAR WITNESS, BECAUSE
YE HAVE BEEN WITH ME FROM THE BEGINNING.

I PROCEED to represent the extra-
ordinary works which the apostles were
enabled to perform, in confirmation of
the gospel. The miracles done by them,
to recommend their doctrine to the notice
of the world, were not inferior to those
done by Jesus himself. They healed the
sick

sick with a word's speaking; they raised the dead to life; and the character of their miracles was, for the most part, benevolent, though in some instances the power of God was manifested in them for the reproof and correction of those who opposed themselves.

But, though the miracles wrought by the apostles resembled, and were not, perhaps, inferior in number to those done by Jesus himself, yet an attentive observer may discover a difference in the manner of them. By the master they were performed in consequence of a power which he constantly possessed. He could, whenever he pleased, interpose for the relief and recovery of the sick and necessitous. But the disciples did not enjoy this power at all times: they were to wait for some manifestation of the will of God, that it was his design to do any particular extraordinary act by their means. Our Saviour, being perfectly well acquainted with the mind of God, and with all the consequences of his own actions, knew
of

of himself when it was proper for him to perform any miraculous cure. Or rather, it seemed agreeable to the fulness of wisdom which dwelt in him, and to that undissembled benevolence, by which he was governed, to show himself the friend and benefactor of all who applied. He dispensed his favours as the son of the family, who might give when, and what, and to whom he pleased; the others as the servants who were to take particular direction from their Lord. There are several particulars in the history of the early ages, which prove that the apostles had not this power at all times. St. Paul, in particular, speaks of it as what gave him no small concern, that he left Trophimus sick at Miletum, and so was deprived of the pleasure and assistance which his company would have afforded him. Now we cannot suppose that the apostle would have failed to have wrought a cure for him, and restored him to perfect health and strength; but that he was inducted with this power of performing miraculous cures under certain limitations.

These

These wonderful works, whether of judgment or mercy, were not intended to be done by the ministers of Jesus at their own discretion, but by the particular direction of the spirit of God, from whom the power was derived. But still it was agreeable to the wisdom of God, that a variety of miracles should be performed by them; they were indued with a power which their enemies were not able to withstand, and which seems sufficient to convince all impartial persons, who will attend to it, that God was with them.

This power is imputed to the agency of the spirit of God. It was by him that they were invested with this authority, and directed to such a use of it as should appear most subservient to the interests of the christian religion. It is quite unnecessary to enumerate the particular instances of the exercise of this power which appear in the course of their ministry. We have an authentic and a well attested account of them in the apostolic history. The history of the propagation of the christian

christian religion, which we have in the book called the Acts of the Apostles, was written by Luke, who was an eye witness of several of the miracles which he relates. It has all the marks of a faithful narrative: the facts which it contains are allowed to be true by the earliest opposers of christianity; they do not make it a matter of dispute, whether the wonderful works recorded of Jesus and his apostles were done by them or not, but only whether they were sufficient to prove a divine commission, which I shall consider under the next head.

It is sufficient for my present purpose, that the apostles had a power, in many instances, of healing the sick, of casting out devils, or of curing the insane, whose disorders were, in that age, usually imputed to the agency of evil spirits or demons, of raising the dead, of executing a severe and exemplary punishment, on proper occasions, upon those whose conduct had a notorious tendency to bring a reflection on the christian faith, and thus
to

to obstruct the success of it; and to manifest some extraordinary kindness to others, where it might be the means of preparing the way for the more extensive influence of their heavenly doctrine, and leading to the universal spread of truth and holiness.

This is not to be considered as a complete account of the gifts and powers which were communicated to the first preachers of the christian religion by the spirit of God. In order to this, it would be necessary to consider the several persons who received them, the stations, for which they were designed, and the particular business to which they were called out. If we had an exact account of the labours of every individual, who entered on this great work of converting the world, we should find, it may be, that all the ministers of this dispensation were respectively furnished with those particular abilities which were required in the posts for which they were designed.

We

We may justly regret it, as a loss to the christian world, that we are not supplied with such a history; but it appears from the accounts which we have, that, as there were superior and inferior officers in the christian church, so there was a variety of gifts suited to this subordination. As they were called to deal with different sorts of persons, so were they differently furnished.

The apostles, who had the highest posts and most distinguished spheres, were suitably provided for the execution of their high office. They had the clearest and fullest account of the christian revelation; and it was appointed, not only that inferior christians, but that other ministers should receive it from them. They had the gift of discerning spirits, and of choosing out from amongst those, who offered themselves, such persons as were best fitted for, and most inclined to, any particular employment. And it seemed good to the holy spirit of God, on some occasions, to impart to inferior teachers

and private christians, such virtues as might conduce to the edification of the general body of christians. It should seem, indeed, that, on the first appearance of christianity, every single person received of these gifts of the spirit in a greater or less degree, which is intimated in the expression, that God hath given of his spirit to all who obey him; but then they were of various kinds, according to their different circumstances; though they all proceeded from the same being, and were conducive to the same great ends, to promote christian knowledge and holiness.

As some of the ministers of the christian religion had their principal business in the Jewish, and others in the Gentile worlds, they appear to be provided with such powers as they more particularly needed. A single instance may be sufficient to illustrate this; the question I mean concerning the perpetual obligation of the Jewish ceremonial law. The law of Moses is not improperly divided into

moral

moral, judicial and ceremonial. This distinction it may be convenient to keep in mind, in order to understand the present question. The moral part of this law is binding upon all persons in every age and country, and under every form of religion. It is founded upon such reasons as respect the moral nature of man, and therefore concern all men equally. The judicial precepts related to the people to whom it is given, as a distinct society, under a particular form of government, and therefore continued in force as long as that subsisted. The ceremonial law had a particular reference to the idolatrous customs of the eastern nations, by whom they were surrounded, and was intended to preserve them from the contagion of idolary, and to keep up the worship of the one living and true God, till a more perfect form of religion could be introduced. From this account it appears, that the Jewish ceremonial law was no longer to be in force after the christian religion was received. But, as this was a doctrine which would be an

insurmount-

insurmountable obstacle to the reception of the gospel among them, as it was not criminal in them to continue to comply with the received usages of their country, and as the pure and spiritual doctrines of christianity would, by degrees, wean those who received it, from all undue regard to ceremonies, they were permitted to retain them: and it does not appear to have been particularly revealed, even to the apostles themselves, for some time at least, that the ceremonial law was no longer to be in force. Though this might be inferred from some general principles of the christian religion, and it was evident even from the writings of their own prophets, that the ceremonies of their religion did not deserve that stress which they were in general disposed to lay upon them. Thus the case appears to have stood with those who are called, by way of distinction, the apostles of the circumcision.

But such as were to preach to the idolatrous Gentiles were to proceed in a different

different manner. It would have effectually prevented the spread of the gospel, if they had propagated Judaism along with it. The customs of the Jews were so different from those of other nations, that there was no probability of their being adopted by any, but such as had been brought up in the observance of them. For this reason the great apostle of the Gentiles and his companions were more particularly instructed on this head. The apostle Paul was clearly of opinion, that the Gentiles were under no obligation to keep the old law; that they were christians by the profession of their faith in Christ, and needed no other institution or ceremony to entitle them to all the privileges of christians. To them therefore he preached the pure gospel of Christ, without any mixture of Jewish usages. And when the christian zealots, who were for retaining the peculiar institutions of Moses, insisted that his converts should be circumcised, he strenuously maintained their liberty, and would not submit in the least to those who would

have imposed on them hereby the whole burden of the ceremonial law. Thus you see the different circumstances of the christian preachers plainly required that there should be a variety of gifts, though all still proceeded from the spirit of truth; and that there is no room for any objection to the christian on this account.

Having thus considered the testimony of the spirit to Jesus, in the gifts and powers which his ministers received, I shall proceed to state the argument which hence arises for the divine original of the gospel. And this will lie in a little compass: for, if it be acknowledged that the apostles and other ministers were in this extraordinary manner qualified to explain and enforce the christian religion, there will be little room left for doubt, whether or no it was of God. No person, methinks, can deny that such an extraordinary supply of wisdom to poor illiterate fishermen, to persons who had no opportunity of learning these things in a common way; and such talents for communicating

communicating them to the world, and for gaining the attention of mankind, must incontestably prove that they were of God. Besides, this effusion of the spirit, as appears from my text, was an accomplishment of a promise which Jesus had made to his apostles: and if they had not received it, in some degree or other, he must have been considered as a deceiver. The disciples of Jesus were under great concern at the thoughts of his speedy departure from them. For their support in this circumstance he assured them that he would send one, who should be a comforter to them in his absence, and who, by the provision which he would make for their knowledge of the gospel, and for their success in preaching it, would fill their hearts with joy. Our Saviour knew their hearts; that they were sincere friends to the truths of God; and that therefore whatever other trouble they might have, the conviction which they would hereby gain of the truth of their principles, and the prospect which they would have of receiving all the

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blessings

blessings which their master had discovered, would give them the highest satisfaction. When, therefore, he promised them the spirit of truth, it was under the name of the comforter. Our Saviour was acquainted with all the designs of Providence, which respected the establishment and success of his religion. Hence he foretold such events as it appeared necessary for his apostles to be acquainted with: these predictions receiving their accomplishment afforded new proof of his extraordinary character, and fresh presumptions of the accomplishment of his undertaking.

Thus did the ministry of the spirit bear witness to Jesus, and tend to the establishment of his religion.

I can easily imagine, that there are persons, who will reckon this a very short and defective account of what is called the witness of the spirit to the truth of the gospel. They have understood by the witness of the spirit, a firm persuasion of

of the truth of the christian religion; wrought in the minds of particular persons, by which they have known that it was from God. But the scriptures of truth are far from countenancing such a notion as this. If there were such a revelation as this supposes, made to every particular person, we should have no occasion at all for the written word. It would be quite superfluous to discourse on the truth of the christian religion, or to examine any of the arguments which might present themselves. The labours of the apostles were quite insignificant; the reasonings which they produced entirely beside the purpose, and the sufferings through which they passed, answered no end, but to gratify the malice of their enemies, and to make their lives miserable. This is a notion which lays a foundation for the wildest enthusiasm, and the grossest error and imposition. Those who contend, that the scheme of christianity must be revealed to every particular person by the immediate agency of the spirit of God, are evidently leading
those

those who hearken to them, to ascribe to a divine teaching, and to clothe with a kind of infallibility every wild notion which they receive into their minds. Do but suppose them firmly persuaded of any thing, and then let it be ever so absurd, whatever argument may be brought against it, they can never be convinced. They have received it from the spirit, and all reasoning in opposition to it they regard as mere sophistry.

It is much to be regretted that such accounts have ever been given of this doctrine. By this means it has come to pass, that all other accounts of it have fallen under suspicion, and have been received with a secret fear of being led away beyond the words of truth and soberness. I am not conscious of delivering a single sentiment on the subject which is not consistent with the strictest and severest use of reason. I know not that I have given way to imagination in a single instance, or suffered myself, by any supposed mysteriousness in the question, to wander beyond

beyond what the coolest understanding may be supposed to dictate. And yet, I should not be greatly surprised if, from the nature of the subject, and the manner in which it has often been treated, some hasty censurer should be led to pronounce all that has been said a mere piece of enthusiasm, unworthy the attention of a wise and sensible man. But, as hasty censure is seldom worthy of any great attention, so that which is grounded on the mere sound of words, without any regard to their meaning, may be easily despised.

It will appear from the present discourse, that many passages of scripture relating to the spirit may have been applied to the circumstances of christians in general, which related solely to the first ages of the christian church, and to the extraordinary events which were peculiar to them. The pretensions which have been made to an extraordinary impulse and influence have been the occasion of many inconveniences in the christian church,

church, and of no small injury to the christian cause. And it cannot surely be thought unreasonable, if we take the same liberty which was allowed to the first age of our religion, to try the spirits whether they are of God.

It will be said, that the operation of the spirit of God is not confined to a particular age, but is the great means of the wisdom, holiness and comfort of christians in all ages, and will constantly attend all such as love God to the end of the world. Far be it from us to fix any bounds to the agency of God on the minds of his creatures. Every good gift, and every perfect gift, cometh down from above; and, among other blessings which our Saviour encourages us to expect from the paternal care of God, he mentions this among the rest, that he will give his holy spirit to those who ask him. And humility requires it from us to impute all our improvement in the christian life to his will and agency, in whom we live and move and have our being. But no man, from any supposed operation or influence

fluence of the divine spirit, is entitled to any greater regard than his intellectual and moral accomplishments give him. If he be qualified to explain and enforce the truths of God, we shall be ready, we ought at least, to hear him with attention. If there appear in any one those fruits of the spirit, which, according to the apostle's description, are joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; or more generally, if all goodness, righteousness and truth; we are obliged to honour his character and imitate his virtues.

In our endeavour after higher measures of virtue we shall, if we know ourselves, be earnest to secure the presence of the Almighty, and the aids of his grace and spirit. Under this conduct, we may hope to be led into all necessary truth; to abound in all good works; and, after sharing the present consolations of virtue, to attain to the rewards of eternal life, which he will bestow on those who love him, by Jesus Christ.

SERMON

... of the divine spirit is called to
any greater regard than his intellectual
and moral accomplishments give him a
he is entitled to a high and exalted
rank of God, we shall be enabled
ought at least to bear him witness
If there appear in any one those fruits of
the Spirit, which, according to the apostle
are mentioned, as love, peace, long suffering,
gentleness, good will, trust, meekness,
kindness, temperance, &c. more generally, if
all good acts, righteousness and truth; we
are obliged to honour his character and
impute his virtues. It is the duty of
the church to do so, and of every
individual to do so in his sphere.
In our endeavour after higher measures
of virtue we shall, if we know ourselves
best, be led to adore the goodness of the
Almighty, and the love of his grace and
mercy. Under this conduct we may hope
to be led into all necessary trials, to
abound in all good works, and thus
having the present consolations of virtue,
to attain to the rewards of eternal life,
which he will bestow on those who love
him, by Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.
SERMON

S E R M O N VIII.

*On Friendship, from the History of Jonathan
and David.*

1 SAMUEL xviii. 3.

THEN JONATHAN AND DAVID MADE A COVENANT,
BECAUSE HE LOVED HIM AS HIS OWN SOUL.

IT is not easy to recollect a character, in sacred or profane history, in which the most amiable qualities of the heart are more conspicuous than in that of Jonathan, whose friendship for David is celebrated in the text.

It is impossible for words to give a juster picture of the most perfect friendship than those here used. He loved him as his own soul.

There

There was something so striking in David's person and address, that his noble friend was strongly prejudiced in his favour the first time he saw him. He had no sooner ended his discourse with Samuel than the affections of Jonathan were so strongly attached to him, that, to use the expressive language of the history, "the soul of Jonathan was knit unto the soul of David, and he loved him as his own soul." But we can scarcely suppose that the perfect friendship which they had for each other, was formed in an instant, or that Jonathan would think it wise or prudent to admit David to such close intimacy on so short an acquaintance. But this first interview made such an impression on his mind, that from that instant commenced that perfect union of mind and sentiment which makes so instructive and interesting a part of their future history.

The proofs which David gave of a sincere, disinterested friendship, were such, no doubt, as were abundantly satisfactory to

to his amiable friend; but the history furnishes us only with these and the like particulars in confirmation of it.

That the friendship of David for the son of Saul continued in all its warmth and purity, though the father sought his life, so that it contributed to produce that tenderness for his implacable enemy, which would not permit him to hurt a hair of his head; that it remained during the life of his friend, and occasioned the most tender and pathetic lamentation for his untimely death.

But, if these expressions of David's love for Jonathan may be thought ambiguous, those which Jonathan gave him in return, were indubitable proofs of sincere affection. Instead of giving him up, when his father from a professed friend became his bitterest enemy, he preserved an inviolable attachment to him, and even incurred the displeasure of his father to serve his friend. His love to David was proof against a much stronger temptation,

a temptation which proved his friendship to be disinterested indeed. He was no stranger of the appointment of David to the throne of his father, in prejudice to his own expectations, and yet he still allowed him the same place in his heart. He was a daily witness to his growing fame and interest in the affections of the people; but this, instead of exciting his envy, or cooling his affections, gave him the sincerest joy. Uncommon as such instances may be, the rival was lost in the friend.

The great and amiable Jonathan was not destitute of other shining qualities. He appears a soldier of distinguished courage and prudence. He was humane, as well as brave; and, in the decline of his father's government, stood high in popular esteem. He was a faithful subject to a tyrannical vindictive monarch; a dutiful son to a violent passionate father. But neither his loyalty nor filial affection could mislead him to forget the rights of his friend, or prevent

prevent his standing up in his defence; when unjustly oppressed.

Adversity, it is commonly said, tries friends; but Jonathan's friendship could not be hurt by such a trial. Whilst David was in the good graces of the king, and surrounded with the splendours of a court, he found many profuse in their expressions of respect, and ambitious to be ranked in the number of his friends, who probably afterwards deserted him. When in disgrace at court, he sought an asylum in his own country, and took refuge in the court of an enemy.

But it does not appear, that these circumstances had any farther influence on the mind of Jonathan, than to attach him more closely to the cause of David, when so many had combined against him.

A competition of interest frequently occasions the dissolution of that friendship which stands the test of other trials: but even in these circumstances, the sin-

cerity of Jonathan's friendship continued to shine with the same unclouded lustre. He appears prepared to rejoice in the elevation of his friend, and to submit, from the son of a prince, to become the subject of another.

No words are so proper to do full justice to the sentiments of his heart, as those which he uses himself, when speaking on this subject. "Fear not," says he, "for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee, and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth."

This striking instance of warm disinterested friendship I have chosen to lay before you, by way of introduction to a discourse on the nature and advantages of this amiable virtue. The instance is the more pleasing as it contains, perhaps, the best answer which can be made to the objections which we sometimes hear raised to the reality of friendship, and to the insinuations which are thrown out to the disadvantage

disadvantage of those who pretend to it. There are, doubtless, many whose kindness hangs upon their lips, but never reaches their hearts. There are many, who will profess great esteem for those whom they secretly despise; and, when they have compassed their own ends, can desert or even betray them. There are others, who from fickleness of temper are continually changing their companions, and are at one time very intimate with one, afterwards with another. On these a wise man can have no dependance. But it by no means follows that there are no real friends.

The royal youth in our text is a plain instance to the contrary, and may serve to give credit to the declaration of Solomon, that there is a friend who sticketh closer than a brother.

As to the nature of friendship, the account which I should choose to give of it is, that it is a union which has its foundation in sincerity and tenderness of heart,

and which will lead a man steadily and universally to seek the interest of his friend, as far as it can be done consistently with the obligations under which we lie to mankind, and to the author of our being.

The human heart is, doubtless, conscious of benevolent affections, which unite every man to his fellow-being, and which will not suffer any human creature to be indifferent to him.

These affections, if listened to, will effectually restrain all injustice and treachery, and lead us to love our neighbour as ourselves. But there is a certain tenderness of affection which friends feel for each other, which is very distinct from that general affection which is shared by all mankind. It is impossible that true friendship should subsist, where there is not a real esteem for the dispositions and character of the person who is the object of it. But there are many who share our kind wishes, as our fellow-creatures,
who,

who, on account of their temper and conduct, we cannot esteem or delight in. And yet it is not virtue or merit alone, which conciliates our friendly sentiments: for though it be impossible it should have any real existence, where those virtues are really wanting which our hearts approve, yet there is a certain suitableness of sentiment, disposition and character, which lead us to prefer one to another of equal, perhaps superior virtues; and for want of which, though we may esteem them highly for their virtues, we cannot afford them the first place in our hearts.

From this account of friendship we shall easily distinguish it from the arts of sycophants and flatterers, who, with all their pretensions of love to our persons, of esteem for our character, and great zeal for our interest, have no other design than either to share our fortune, or to serve some purpose or other which they find themselves unable to compass without our assistance. And if, from a too great easiness of temper, or that unsuspi-

cious confidence which sincerity creates, we have been imposed upon by such artful hypocrisy, this is no objection to the existence of real friends.

It is equally easy to separate it from such connections into which we sometimes enter, to answer purposes to which our single abilities are not equal, and in which we are no farther concerned for each other, than as the common interest of the partnership may require. Such a union, it is obvious, may be formed without any particular affection between the parties concerned; and, where the success of their particular designs is out of the question, they may be as indifferent to each other's real interest and true happiness as the rest of the world. I say may be, though certainly it is very possible, nay, indeed it is natural, and to minds disposed for friendship hardly avoidable, but that two persons who converse freely together, and are united by interest, if they discover amiable dispositions and shining virtues in their transactions in life,

life, should form a sincere esteem for each other, and a particular attachment to each other's interests. If they be worthy and valuable persons, useful members of society, and have hearts formed for friendship, such virtues and such connections are highly favourable to friendship. But still it may not rise to that delicacy and warmth of affection which proceed from harmony of sentiment, and union of hearts. Such a connection may be the occasion, but is not to be considered as the source of friendship.

It is scarcely necessary to add, that friendship is totally different from any confederacy into which men may enter to accomplish such purposes as may justly prejudice their fame, or be injurious to their neighbour. Connections formed on such principles, and with such designs, have no right to a name which expresses the purest of affections, which is an argument of true virtue in those who enter into it, and is chiefly valuable as it is the means of its encouragement and support.

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For it is impossible that they should be rightly affected to one another, whatever they may pretend, who are strangers to a right temper of mind; or that they should have a just regard for their intimate companions, who being under the influence of vicious habits, are destitute of that affection which is due to our fellow-creatures at large. I shall conclude this account of the nature of friendship, with that simple, but most beautiful description of it which we have in the book of Ruth, in her address to her mother-in-law, urging her to return to her own country; “and Ruth said, intreat me
“not to leave thee, or to return from
“following thee; for whither thou goest
“I will go, and where thou lodgest I
“will lodge; thy people shall be my
“people, and thy God my God; where
“thou diest will I die, and there will I
“be buried: the Lord do so to me, and
“more also, if ought but death part me
“and thee.” Ruth i. 16.

These particulars may serve to give us some imperfect notion of friendship. Let

us now proceed to enumerate the advantages of it. And here we may consider, first, the effect which it will naturally have on our own minds to be conscious of the sentiments of real friendship, and to have some good assurances of the return of it. The human heart is never so perfectly at rest, or happy, as when under the influence of the sweetest and best dispositions towards mankind.

They can best give their testimony to the truth of this observation, who have attended to the state of their minds when some benevolent disposition, as compassion, generosity, or any other amiable virtue has prevailed. The satisfaction which they have then experienced, are, they will acknowledge, a rich equivalent for the labour which they have occasioned, or the expense to which they have put them. Nay, even the pain which compassion gives, is richly compensated by the pleasure which accompanies it.

Friendship, too, may certainly claim some share in this satisfaction. The
mind,

mind, which is conscious of a sincere attachment to a virtuous and worthy object, partakes at the same time of the highest mental entertainment. It is pleased with itself to be capable of such sentiments, and all its generous efforts in the cause of a friend are attended with its own approbation. To be assured, at the same time, of the affection and esteem of one whom we love and admire; to experience the returns of faithful affection, the ready service, the cheerful gratitude, and the entire confidence of an obliged and obliging companion; what can give a greater relish to our enjoyments, or afford a better support under our afflictions? Our disappointments may be grievous, but the kind assistance of our friend will enable us to bear them: our designs may be obstructed, our persons insulted or injured, and many valuable possessions wrested from us, by the power and malice of enemies. But still, whilst we have a resource in friendship, we cannot want assistance and countenance, or at least consolation, while we retain an interest in those

those whom we love; whilst we have their tender sympathy we shall have a healing balm for every wound which we may receive.

The society and converse of our friend will, in a high degree, conduce to the improvement of our minds. It is very desirable to have a friend, in whose society we may engage in those pursuits, and who will share with us the toil with which our search after knowledge is attended. A friend will freely communicate every observation which he has made on the various objects that may engage the human mind; and, by adding what he has collected, will, of course, enrich our minds with a great variety of knowledge. There will be improvement too, as well as pleasure in imparting, in our turn, what we have observed. Our own judgment of things may deceive us. We may reckon that to be just and solid, which is only specious and superficial; and we shall even judge better ourselves of what we have received into our minds, when we view

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it in the light in which it must appear when clothed with the words, and submitted to the consideration of another. We shall then more easily improve upon it, correct what is amiss in it, and give it such a form and substance as will render it still more beautiful and useful.

To proceed; as friends will be serviceable to each other in the pursuit of knowledge, so will they experience great advantages from their society in the cultivation and practice of virtue. As their intimacy is founded in the esteem and approbation which their good and amiable qualities excite, their frequent converse with each other will, of course, improve them. They will each of them present a useful example to each other, and afford mutual encouragement in what is good and worthy of praise.

Their example will edify each other, their accomplishments will probably be rather different; and whatever good they discover in the heart and life of the other, will

will come with such a commanding power as they will not be able to resist: and in the same manner in which their virtues will improve, their imperfections will decrease and die away. Thus will they by degrees learn to exercise the same self-command, the same generous compassion; the same steady justice, and the same true piety which they behold with so much pleasure in their friend and companion.

They will likewise encourage and animate one another in every just and laudable purpose. The hope of the esteem and friendship of good men, is a motive to a worthy conduct, which has very considerable influence on good and generous minds. It is uncertain, how far we shall succeed in our endeavours to obtain it, but the approbation of our friend, which is naturally of the most consequence to us, we are sure to have, while our conduct is wise and honourable. His soothing words, his kind looks, his faithful aid are sure to attend us in the way of wisdom; and his undisguised and ready

ready praises will certainly follow all our good endeavours. A true friend will also be a faithful reprover, where any thing occurs in the life and character of the other which may appear to merit it: and if reproof is ever likely to do good, it is when it is extorted from a friend, and accompanied with the tenderest affection.

Such, may we suppose, was the friendship which subsisted between Jonathan and David. Their history does not furnish us with all we could wish to know of its effects and advantages; but it must doubtless have been sincere and ardent to justify the strong expression of loving him as his own soul. The advantages arising from studying such instances of heroic friendship, are too obvious to be mentioned. I shall conclude therefore with one or two reflections.

1. How thankful should we be to the providence of God, that he has provided for us such agreeable and useful connections; that he has made us capable of friendship,

friendship and formed so many worthy of our esteem and love, that he has made us capable of discovering to others, and receiving from them, those proofs of friendship which are the greatest cordial in human life.

2. Let it be our concern to proceed in forming and preserving such connections, so as to obtain, secure and preserve all the advantages and blessings of friendship. Our first business is to see, that we are ourselves worthy of the honourable character of a true and faithful friend, and that we have a constant disposition to discharge all the offices of this relation : and after this, we should use that caution in the choice of our friends, and preserve that temper in the enjoyment of their esteem and love, which may preserve us from, and fortify us against the bitter disappointments to which all human friendships are liable. As to the choice of friends, we should try and prove them well, before we admit them to a place in our hearts; and though there are no

certain and infallible rules, by which to distinguish the pretended friend from such as are sincerely attached to our interest; yet it is possible, with prudence and circumspection, to attain some good degree of certainty. And when this is once attained, we should thenceforward dismiss all further suspicion, and treat our friends with that generous openness which may win their hearts, and insure all the proper returns of affection. There is doubtless some foundation for the complaints which are made of the uncertainty of the friendships which we contract; but perhaps the instances in which those are disappointed who are capable of friendship, and deserving it, are less rare than is commonly imagined.

An event indeed awaits us, which necessarily interrupts all such connections, and seems to bring them to a final period. And this is an event which every human creature must expect: and this cup would be bitter indeed to those who cordially love each other, were it not for the prospect

pect of a future state, where we are led to hope that these or other connections far preferable to them shall revive or continue for ever. And in this light, that which appears to throw the greatest damp on such amiable affections, does in reality add the greatest lustre to them.

If we enter into friendship with each other on virtuous principles, and use it as a spur to our improvement in useful knowledge and virtue, we may expect in this future period, which is the object of our desire and hope, the commencement of a new and more exalted friendship, under the influence of those sentiments, which in heaven shall be established and perfected.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses, which are arranged in a columnar fashion. The names are written in a cursive script, and the addresses are written in a more formal, printed style. The list includes names such as "John Smith", "Mary Jones", and "Robert Brown", along with their respective addresses.

2. The second part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These notes are written in a cursive script and are arranged in a columnar fashion. They appear to be a continuation of the list or a separate set of entries.

3. The third part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These notes are written in a cursive script and are arranged in a columnar fashion. They appear to be a continuation of the list or a separate set of entries.

4. The fourth part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These notes are written in a cursive script and are arranged in a columnar fashion. They appear to be a continuation of the list or a separate set of entries.

5. The fifth part of the document is a series of short, handwritten notes or entries. These notes are written in a cursive script and are arranged in a columnar fashion. They appear to be a continuation of the list or a separate set of entries.

The first part of the manuscript is written in a cursive hand, and contains a list of names, which are probably the names of the persons who were present at the meeting.

SERMON IX.

A FUNERAL SERMON

FOR THE REV. MR. SEDDON OF WARRINGTON.

HEBREWS xiii. 7.

REMEMBER THOSE WHO HAVE THE RULE OVER
YOU, WHO HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU THE WORD
OF GOD; WHOSE FAITH FOLLOW, CONSIDERING
THE END OF THEIR CONVERSATION.

THESE words evidently refer to the
pastors and teachers of the christian
church; but the sentiments conveyed by
our translation are not the same with those
of the original. For in the first place we
should conclude from the former part of
the verse in the English; that the persons
spoken of were still living in opposition
to the latter part which supposes them to

be dead. Besides the words, "them which have the rule over you," will give an English reader an idea of certain powers in the pastors either to determine the faith and duty of others, or to inflict certain penalties on their disobedience; neither of these notions is consistent with that authority in the church which our Saviour has reserved to himself, or with the obligation which lie upon every christian to search the scriptures, and to make the best use in his power of the understanding which God has given him, in order to determine what he is to believe and practise. But the words of the original convey no such sentiment. The primary sense of the word, which we translate "rule," is "to lead;" and though it may sometimes be applied to governors, yet it refers to them only as persons chosen to lead or precede in any particular affair. And thus the words may be rendered. "Remember your pastors, or guides, who have spoken the words of God unto you, and considering the end of their conversation, follow their faith."

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In this sense alone would I apply them to my deceased friend, whose death I am called upon to consider and improve. And the success I principally wish in the present discourse is to prevail upon you so to remember your deceased pastor as to practise the useful lessons which he has from time to time given you, and to copy the virtues of which he has left you so striking an example.

It is to the latter that I would at present in particular call your attention. It is very desirable that we study the character of our fellow-creatures whilst they are living; and after they are taken from us, that we may select from them such particulars as are worthy of our imitation. Virtue, it is allowed, may be taught with more accuracy and precision by precept and reasoning. And those writings are not without their use in which every particular virtue is exactly defined, the distinct offices of it pointed out, and a just representation made of its excellency and use. Thus the understanding will be

convinced; and the person who is determined to seek his own highest happiness will be directed to the course which he must pursue to the attainment of this end. By these means, those who will be at the pains to study, and are capable of forming the several distinct virtues into one consistent whole, may draw out and set to view that excellent, amiable character which is complete in all its parts. But the use of such discourses is chiefly confined to men of study and reflection, and is adapted rather to convince their understandings than to win their hearts. But the virtues which appear in real life, the instances of integrity, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness, which, in our commerce with mankind, fall under our observation, if less complete, will be more obvious and engaging. The lessons which they prescribe are level to every understanding, and they powerfully recommend it to every one who observes them, to go and do the like.

I could wish you indeed to remember your late pastor as a preacher, and to recollect

recollect the many discourses which you have heard from his lips. I will hope you will never forget with what judgment, with what fidelity, with what grace, he represented to you the important truths of natural and revealed religion; and the use which he made of them to excite your love of virtue, and to engage you to the practice of it. But still his discourses, excellent as they were, are far inferior to the example of a friendly, upright, engaging conversation, which appeared in his life.

And in this respect, though dead, he still speaketh. His discourses may be forgotten, or should they again fall under your perusal, they would want the advantage which his earnest and affectionate address gave them. But the proof which he gave of a sincere, rational piety, the prudence and activity which he discovered in planning and conducting schemes for the good of mankind, and particularly for the benefit of the rising generation will, I trust, be never forgotten. And God grant the remembrance

remembrance of him may stir up those who are left behind, to exert all the abilities with which God has distinguished them, to make up his lack of service, and to continue and perfect the designs which he left unfinished.

It pleases the wise disposer of all things to shorten the lives of those who are most active and useful. For what reason, it is not possible for us to say. It is our indispensable duty to submit to what infinite wisdom appoints, and to acknowledge every thing to be good which proceeds from the hand of our heavenly Father. But more than this is required from us. At the same time that we resign our friends into his hands, from whom we received them, we should consider what we may learn *from their character, from the society which we have had with them, and from the manner in which they are removed from us.* The characters of good men, whilst they live, are not always properly considered.

sidered. Opposite sentiments and interests are but too apt to occasion an alienation of affection. And thus many are blind to the virtues which they ought to admire and imitate. The calumny of evil tongues, the base practices of envy and malice, rob the best men of the praise and esteem which they merit, and by obscuring the splendour of their good works, deprive the world of the benefit of their example. But when they are taken out of the world their excellency begins to be known, and their characters may with greater advantage be held forth as worthy the love and imitation of those who survive them. Malice and envy, however inveterate, are apt to die away, when the object of them is removed out of their sight: and those who could not do justice to a hated character whilst he was with them in the world, when he is taken from them, will allow him his just praise, and be content, though he should be perpetuated to the succeeding generation, as worthy to be followed. And the ill will even of bigots, more difficult

ficult than any others to be appeased, will spare those when dead, whom it persecuted whilst they were alive, and, from a conviction of their virtues, will almost forget the prejudices which their difference of sentiment occasioned.

On these accounts it is less invidious, and therefore more useful to delineate the characters of good men, and propose them to the imitation of mankind after they are dead than whilst they are alive. Let me, therefore, be your monitor, to follow the faith of our friend whose loss we deplore, and whose faith we are met together to improve.

And in laying before you his excellent useful character, I should use the utmost caution, that friendship may not lead me to say too much; and shall hope that the ready assent of all who knew him, will accompany me in every particular which I shall recommend to your attention.

The enduements of nature with which he was blest, are allowed by all his acquaintance

quaintance to have been very considerable. His judgment was clear and penetrating, and his conceptions of things, at the same time that they were just and excellent, were so lively, that it was easy for him to represent them under the most pleasing images. His memory was remarkably strong, so that what he heard or read he usually retained; and, by a vivacity of imagination, as well as by means of sedate reflection, delivered again so as to make it properly his own. When it is added, that these talents were cultivated and improved by a regular education, from the earliest part of life, by a careful attendance on good masters in every branch of learning, and by a diligent perusal of the best authors, which he continued to the last stage of his life, we shall be less surprised at the large stock of knowledge which he appears to have acquired, or at the facility with which he communicated it to those who attended upon him. Those talents which he possessed, and this use to which he applied them, contributed greatly to those moral sentiments and dispositions

positions which constitute the highest excellence of the human character. Hence his mind was raised above those low cares and pursuits which engross the attention of the greater part of mankind; and being by these means superior to those contracted selfish views, which more than any thing else debase the human character, he was inclined to seek his truest interests and highest glory in a diffusive benevolence, in a generous concern to contribute to the pleasure and happiness of all with whom he conversed. And his benevolence to men, according to its natural course and progress, where it is sincere, grew up to that manly, rational piety which is its truest ornament and its complete gratification.

It is natural to suppose, that a mind, thus formed, would entertain honourable sentiments of human nature, which will prepare for a just conception of the perfections and character of the great Governor, and lead to the most perfect scheme of natural religion which can be expected

expected from our unassisted powers. And the principles of natural religion, where they are well understood, and firmly believed, will lead an attentive mind to a high esteem for the christian revelation. Here its most useful truths are confirmed, and the doubts which remain with those who are the completest masters of the subject are happily removed. And this was the case with our deceased friend, whose character I am considering. Though by no means disposed to submit to the dictating spirit which some teachers of the christian religion have assumed, and determined to assert the liberty of seeing and judging for himself with which the great Author of our nature has invested his rational creatures, yet he was firmly persuaded of the truth and excellency of the christian religion, and always expressed a peculiar satisfaction in the immortal hope which it encourages, and great thankfulness for the noble supports and comforts which it affords in the journey of life. And though he was a real friend to all good men, and ever willing

willing to embrace such as discovered a good meaning in religion, however he might think them mistaken in matters of inferior consequence, yet he was never afraid or unwilling to oppose such appearances of superstition or enthusiasm as it fell in his way to combat. The just sentiments which he ever entertained of the character of the Supreme Being raised him above the unmanly fears which superstition inspires, and gave him the highest contempt for its numberless arts of appeasing an offended Deity: and though his imagination was naturally warm and glowing, the soundness of his judgment ever preserved him from the sallies of enthusiasm, and formed his devotions into a steady principle of obedience to the commandments of God. It was upon principle that he first appeared and ever afterwards continued among the protestant dissenters, and that he devoted his life to the support of their cause in subservience to the superior regard, which he ever maintained, to the great interests of virtue and religion.

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Should it be asked, on what foundation these things are said by one, who cannot see into the heart; I answer, there are the clearest evidences, which can be had from his public discourses, from his general behaviour, and from his conversation with his most intimate friends. What his preaching was, what his manner of life was, you all know. And those who had the greatest intimacy with him, and frequently saw him in those open unguarded moments when, if ever, the language of the heart will be spoken, know, that the same sentiments were still uppermost, and that a supreme regard to virtue and religion, was his distinguishing characteristic.

Every good man will feel a peculiar concern for the improvement and best interests of the rising generation. If a sincere friend to virtue and religion, it will naturally be his first and last wish, that they may have the same influence over the minds of others, which they have over his own, and, in particular, that

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they may continue in the heart the great instruments of public and private happiness through all succeeding generations. For this reason he is extremely desirous that such methods of education should be encouraged and pursued, as may be likely to answer this purpose. Thus one of the strongest presumptions of a good mind was equally the character of our deceased friend. He always discovered a particular regard for young persons, and had an uncommon facility in adapting his conversation to them in such a manner, as at the same time to conciliate their affections and to promote their best improvement. You need not be told, how great a share he had in a plan for the education of youth, which has been carried into execution in this place. The concern which he ever expressed for its support, honour, and success, the indefatigable pains, which he took for this purpose, the indifference which he showed to fame or censure, to good or evil report, so that he might serve the general designs of the institution, and the satisfaction which he discovered in

in every degree of success, with which it was attended, are known by great numbers, but by none better than those who shared his greatest intimacy, and were acquainted with all his counsels.

On the same principle, on which he was ever active to promote the best success of this seminary, he was at length prevailed upon to enter into the province of a tutor. That in this office he acquitted himself with great usefulness and acceptance, will be easily believed by those who knew him. The testimonies of those who attended upon his lectures, if necessary, might be brought in confirmation of this assertion. He was not only the instructor of his pupils, but their affectionate friend; and heartily desirous, that, whilst under his care, and through the whole of life, they might behave in such a manner, as to be the joy of their friends, the delight of mankind, and secure their own highest happiness. These he professed to be his sentiments and views, as often as he

spoke on this subject: and I have been frequently told, that every part of his conduct in this relation was agreeable to them. So that I may venture to make the appeal to all, who attended on his instructions, whether he has not ever approved himself a wise, affectionate tutor? Has he not consulted your best improvement? has he not shown a peculiar affection and tenderness towards you? Though he was ever desirous to preserve that good order and decency of manners, which are peculiarly graceful in a young person, and which are so essential to the honour and even support of such a seminary; yet he has ever wished and pleaded for such a discipline, as might leave room for the exertion of ingenious dispositions, and prevent irregularities and crimes rather from the shame, with which the commission of them would be attended, than from any other consideration. What has been the success of this generous plan, which speaks such confidence in those whom it is intended to govern, we all wish to know, and I shall greatly rejoice, if, upon inquiry,

inquiry, it shall appear to have succeeded so well as to justify the propriety of it, and to recommend it to the imitation of all succeeding teachers.

These the more public virtues of our deceased brother and friend, though more conspicuous, were not his principal, nor, perhaps, his justest excellencies. In the domestic character, and in his behaviour to his nearest relations, there was so much prudence, affection and tenderness, as could not fail of attracting their highest regard, whilst they enjoyed the benefit of his conversation, and of perpetuating and endearing his memory when they see him no more. To his particular friends too he was peculiarly dear and useful. How engaging was his conversation; how wise and faithful were his counsels! With what readiness did he enter into their laudable views; with what zeal did he seek their interests, defend their characters, and cherish their memories. But I forbear, a private loss ought not to be much insisted upon, where

the public are sufferers. It was his peculiar felicity, that his virtues were adorned with that easy politeness and graceful address, which procured him a general acceptance wherever he appeared, and enabled him to engage great numbers, in different ranks of life, in those plans which he devised, or encouraged for the benefit of mankind. In the conduct of those affairs which he had to transact, he had a remarkable address in proposing what was to be done with such clearness and accuracy, as conduced greatly to its despatch and success. Hence, as well as from other accounts, he was uncommonly useful in the establishment and conduct of the academy in this place, and in other public designs in which he was engaged.

From all these reasons (and to these many others might be added) his loss is generally and very justly deplored. And it is no wonder; it would be strange indeed if it were otherwise; if his particular friends, his affectionate and beloved people,

people, his associates in the useful schemes, in which he was engaged, are oppressed with grief, and ready to say, what shall we do? But what, my friends, are we only to sit down and weep? Let us up and be doing. Let us every one consider what we may learn from the example and conduct of our deceased friend. Let us, according to our several stations, apply the talents which God has given us, to promote the best interests of mankind, and so to insure our own highest felicity.

The character which I have just represented to you, and which I have drawn out, as some may be inclined to think, to too great a length, is intended not merely as a duty of gratitude and affection to the memory of a deceased friend, or as a monument to the worth which his life so amply displayed, but as an instructive lesson to those who are left behind; and an earnest exhortation to work, whilst it is day.

His particular friends will learn from this event to preserve a closer union with

one another, to avoid every occasion of coolness, indifference, or neglect, which may break or interrupt the pleasing connection, and will ever seek those things which will best prove their mutual fidelity and affection.

Those who have been united with him in the conduct of any useful designs, instead of deserting or giving them up, will, if possible, employ a greater attention, and use the utmost application and diligence, that all the reasonable expectations and wishes of those, who have their eyes upon them, may be fully answered.

To the people, who have for so many years attended on his ministry, and received from his lips the great doctrines of our holy religion, with a view to their useful practice, of the duties which it prescribes, it may, with some peculiar propriety, be recommended, to consider what his doctrines and manner of life have been, to recollect and treasure up the useful truths which they have received

ceived from him, and to practise the great duties of which he has given them an example. The worthy exemplary character of a christian minister may be expected to have such peculiar influence upon his people, that those, who have long attended on his services, will be left without excuse, if they have not attained to some good acquaintance with the principles which they profess to have received, and if they have not learned in some degree to adorn them by their christian conversation. Remember what you have so often heard from your late pastor, of the goodness of God in nature and providence; of the merciful intentions to the children of men which he has expressed by Jesus Christ; of the necessity of a virtuous course of life; and of the animating hopes which we are encouraged to entertain in consequence of a sincere desire to keep the commandments of God. Consider how often he has endeavoured to raise your thoughts and affections to the spiritual objects which religion recommends to your particular attention;

tention; with what affection and earnestness he ever recommended those charitable sentiments to one another, and to all mankind, which are the particular and the highest ornaments of the christian character. Let the temper which he laboured to inculcate, appear in your conduct as a christian society, in your regard to the distinguishing doctrines of the christian religion, and in your attendance on all its ordinances. Let it ever be your great concern, that your assembling together from time to time may conciliate mutual esteem and affection; that in all your deliberations may reign a spirit of love and concord; and, in particular, that you may proceed to the choice of a minister to pursue the useful designs of your late pastor, to accomplish the work, which he has begun, with a sole view to the comfort and edification of one another, and to the interests of virtue and religion in the world. And may the great head of the church bring among you a wise and useful minister, who may rightly divide unto you the
word

word of truth, and prove the helper of your holiness and joy, and the instrument of your growing fitness for a state of eternal happiness.

It will not be unseasonable, I am persuaded, to add a short address to the students of this academy, with which our deceased friend was so nearly connected. Such is the experience which you have had, of his tender affection, of his wise advices, of his faithful admonitions, that it may appear superfluous to call upon you to remember him. You will, I doubt not, recollect with peculiar pleasure his pleasing conversation, his engaging manners, and the unaffected concern, which he ever expressed for your improvement and happiness. These are things which you will never forget, whilst any of the records of memory are preserved. As often then as you reflect upon them, you will, I trust, consider the use to which they should be applied by you, to form you to a worthy, honourable conversation, to establish your virtuous

ous purposes, and to train you up for that excellent course of life, which will insure your present and your everlasting happiness.

It is with pleasure, but not without anxiety, that the friends of virtue and religion turn their eyes on such a society as yours. They flatter themselves with hopes, that the candid manners and generous sentiments, which they discover in you in this early period, will produce the fair fruits of wisdom and virtue in your more advanced years; that the course of studies, in which you are engaged, will enrich your minds with those sentiments of prudence, integrity and true devotion; that you will prove the honour and grace of your friends, useful members of society, and in your several stations the guardians of its best interests and the distinguished ornaments of the christian religion, as long as you live. But at the same time they cannot dismiss their fears (and let it not offend you, my young friends that they have their fears) lest bad principles

principles should infect your minds, lest the contagion of evil examples should rob you of your innocence, lest you should be seduced by the love of pleasure, lest you should be spoiled by a constant dissipation, lest you should run in these ways in which ye will offend the Author of your being, and incur the danger of his everlasting displeasure.

As the present occasion will naturally make you serious and thoughtful, let me persuade you not too hastily to dismiss the sentiments which it may suggest to your attention, and the resolutions which it may lead you to form. Consider what your late tutor, what your present tutors, what all the friends of virtue and religion wish to see you, and, as a matter of infinitely greater importance, what the great Governor of the world expects from you, and the account which you must hereafter give of all your advantages, and the purposes to which you have improved them.

It was in part at least for your benefit, that the character of your late worthy
tutor

tutor was so particularly laid open, and the means, by which he was formed to that excellent character which was rendered conspicuous in so many instances in all the parts of his life, were mentioned as a hint which you might possibly take of the studies which you should pursue, and the purposes to which your knowledge and learning should be applied.

But it is impossible to review the character and conduct of our late worthy friend, without a sensible concern, that he was so soon taken from us. We promised ourselves continued increasing pleasure in his conversation, and a growing success in the execution of his purposes; but, alas! they are all broken off, and in the midst of his days he is removed out of our sight. The great Author of life and death has brought him to the period of his being, not in anger to him, blessed be his holy name! The methods of his providence, the promises of his word, carry us beyond death and the grave to the future world, where those, who have
faithfully

faithfully served God and their generation, shall receive a glorious reward, and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father: hence, though we may be unable to restrain our grief, we are not permitted to grieve as those who are without hope.

The suddenness of his removal may be apt to increase our concern; but to a prepared mind, to one who has habitually considered his latter end, death can never be a surprise. If the stroke be reckoned severe, the pain is only of short continuance; and it may be esteemed a peculiar mercy to be excused the lingering pain and sickness, and all the tedious formalities which attend a long confinement in the last stage of this mortal life.

It may be improved by us, to engage us to an habitual preparation for our last summons, and, in particular, to impress upon our minds the important advice of Solomon, "not to boast of to-morrow, "since we know not what a day may "bring forth." The most plausible reason which we can have to wish for
length

length of days, is, that we may have time to accomplish our good purposes, and to complete the useful schemes which we have formed; but we see from numberless instances, that this, as well as every other, is an insufficient one. We often see one and another taken off in the midst of their usefulness to teach us, that our dependance is to be placed in the Almighty alone, and to engage us immediately to apply to the good work, which we have the present opportunity of performing, and never delude ourselves with the hopes of a more convenient season.

The conclusion of the whole is, that we resign our pious friends with a fixed purpose to imitate their virtues, and that by the practice of those good works, by which their lives were distinguished, we prepare to meet them again in that world, where we shall no longer be subject to such interpositions and changes; but shall unite with them in the most perfect society and satisfying enjoyment through eternal ages.

SERMON

SERMON X.

A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER SERMON.

ACTS xxiv. 14.

AFTER THE WAY WHICH THEY CALL HERESY, SO
WORSHIP I THE GOD OF MY FATHERS.

THESE words are taken from the defence which the apostle makes of himself, in answer to the accusation brought against him by the orator Tertullus, who was employed by his countrymen to plead against him before the Roman governor Felix. Paul's only fault was, that he was a christian; and, in particular, that he was the friend of the Gentile world, and a zealous advocate for their admission into the church of Christ without being obliged to submit to the peculiarities of the Jewish religion.

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The persecutions to which he was exposed for his attachment to the gospel, on this large and generous plan, are well known to those who are conversant with the instructive and entertaining history which we have in the book before us. Wherever he came, he was the object of their ill will who were disaffected to the christian religion; and it need not be wondered at, that one so ready and so able to vindicate its cause, should incur the hatred of those who wished to destroy it; and that they should employ every engine which they possessed to expose and suppress him.

It will be matter of surprise, it may be, to a contemplative person, that force should be employed for or against any speculative opinions; and he will be inclined to think that fair and solid reasoning is the only instrument by which error can be detected, or the cause of truth supported. This plea for the most perfect liberty in our inquiries into other subjects, will be urged with some peculiar advantage

tage with respect to religion ; which, if it be of any value at all, must be the effect of inward conviction, and requires the open profession of our real and deliberate sentiments. A serious inquiry after truth will naturally lead a man to question whether he who uses force to compel his neighbour to resign his religious opinions, or, in any other way, tempts him to relinquish them, can himself have any religion at all, however he may, for his worldly interest or convenience, take up the profession of it. This practice will appear peculiarly inconsistent with the christian religion, the object of which is to train up those who receive it, by the sincere and consistent profession of it, for the future world ; and which prescribes mutual good will and charity to all its professors, in their way to it.

But a very slender acquaintance with the history of mankind will show how contrary its practices are to such expectations. In all ages and nations, men have had endless differences with each other,

as on other subjects of inquiry, so, above all, on the subject of religion. And they have prosecuted their differences, not as sincere inquirers after truth, by the free and unrestrained use of their reason, but by invectives against each other, by mutual reproaches, and by all the more serious evils which the stronger party had the power to inflict.

The disciples of Christ soon found that those who had been the murderers of their master were their inveterate and implacable enemies. And it is extremely probable, that, had it not been for the restraints imposed by the Roman power, they had quickly suffered the same fate with their illustrious leader, and their name and religion had expired together. The subjection of the Jewish people to a foreign dominion, was, under Providence, the protection of the christian religion, on its first appearance in the land of Judea, and in some other places. And when the very people who had saved it, in the beginning, became afterwards its enemies, it had taken too deep a root in
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the places where it was professed for any power to extirpate it.

The pious Stephen, the first christian martyr, suffered through the mad zeal of the Jewish people; and he who was afterwards an apostle, and the great assertor of christian liberty, assisted at his execution. The persecuting spirit which he encouraged, and the violence which he practised before his conversion, were retorted upon him, after he took up the christian name. The malice of his enemies against him, as might be expected, ran the highest in Jerusalem; and, had it not been for the interposition of the Roman soldiers, he had fallen a victim to the furious spirit which he had been so instrumental in raising. Nor could he, even under this protection, remain in safety in this city. A conspiracy was formed against his life, by more than forty men who had bound themselves, according to their own account, under a most grievous curse, or made a solemn vow with an anathema annexed, that they would not eat any

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thing till they had killed Paul. What became of these conspirators, whether their vow was kept or dispensed with, is no where related. The means by which Paul was delivered from them, and how he came into the situation described in this chapter, is related in the history.

In further discoursing from the words of the text, I would recommend to your attention the manner in which he declares himself to be a christian; and this, with the reflections which it will naturally suggest, may usefully employ our thoughts on the present occasion.

He by no means acknowledges the charge which had been urged against him by Tertullus, that he was an enemy to society, and that he provoked the Jews to seditious practices in every part of the world, and he expressly denies the only fact with which he was charged, that of profaning the temple; yet he is not afraid or unwilling to declare, that "in the way which they called heretical," he paid his religious

religious addresses "to the God of his fathers." Though the name of Christ be not here mentioned, this is an evident confession of his authority, and of the apostle's sincere regard to the religion of which he was the author, and which has since retained his name. He adds, however, to soften the malice of his enemies, but in perfect conformity to his deliberate sentiments, that he "believed all things which were written in the law and in the prophets." To this declaration he adds his firm expectation of "a resurrection from the dead, both of the just and of the unjust;" and, in connection with it, his firm resolution to keep "a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men."

The apostle will easily be excused in giving his own testimony to his integrity by those who consider his situation, suffering under the malice of his enemies for the sake of his conscience, and charged with practices most contrary to his temper and principles, aggravated by the insinua-

tions of an artful opposer; and especially when it may be added, that his conversation was known to be agreeable to this description of himself; and that he made it not from vanity or a thirst of fame, but to recommend the cause in which he was engaged, and to call up a greater attention to the religion which he preached.

This, now, is the man who was seized in the temple at Jerusalem, dragged out of it by a furious multitude, and in imminent danger of being torn in pieces by them. This upright, zealous friend to what he believed to be the cause of God and truth was pronounced unworthy to live. He whose integrity could not be called in question is exposed to the attacks of furious zealots, who entered into a conspiracy to assassinate him. And, though he had led an upright, conscientious life, not even the friendly temper of his judges could save him from the fury of his persecutors, without an appeal to Cæsar, and a tedious imprisonment in consequence of it.

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I. We may hence learn not to be afraid of the harsh names which our enemies may fix upon us, or the bitter reproaches which they may connect with them. No words have been in more common use to fix an odium on the different sects in the christian church, and indeed on the whole body of christians, by their common enemies, than those of heresy and schism. The Jews called the christians in general sectaries, and treated all the disciples of Christ as heretics. With the Jewish christians, such as asserted the liberty of the Gentiles, and pleaded for their right to all the privileges of christianity, without conforming to the Jewish law, were considered as a dangerous sect, and opposed with the greatest bitterness. When christianity made its appearance in the Gentile world, the preachers of it and their followers were soon considered as unfriendly to the peace of the several states in which they appeared, and their opposition to received opinions and received customs drew on them the odium and rage of the common people;

people; the malice of those whose support or gain depended on the religious rites which were in practice, and the contempt of cooler men, who had not leisure or inclination to examine their pretensions. In short, to use the language which the Jews at Rome held with Paul, "as for this sect, we know that it is every where spoken against."

It would be carrying you too far to take an account of the persecutions which the Christians suffered from Jews and Heathens: it is well known that they had recourse to every art to harass and oppress this rising sect; that it, however, baffled all their attempts, and, in the course of about three centuries, became the religion of the Roman empire, and enjoyed every encouragement which human protection and power could give.

Now they are no longer heretics, but the true catholic church. The powers of this world are on its side; honours and riches are annexed to the performance of
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its sacred offices; its priests have access to the courts and cabinets of princes, and derive from the piety or superstition of great men all the advantages which they can desire. But mark the consequence: the church which retained its purity whilst persecuted, presently loses it on the dawn of prosperity. Many entered into it with worldly views, and the profession of christianity became the road to preferment. Those who had no regard to the cause, took upon them the name, that they might rise to those honours, or gain the other advantages on which they were intent. From this time the ministers of religion presently became the ready instruments of the purposes of the reigning powers, and employed the influence which the sacred character gave them to forward their designs. The rewards which they received in return for these services nourished luxury, pride, and insolence; made them the rivals and the adversaries of each other; and, by degrees, occasioned the most shameful dissensions and cruel persecutions.

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By these means, the name of catholic came at length to be assumed by a part of the christian church; and the rest had the reproachful appellation of heretics, schismatics, and the like. If we trace the events of this hopeful beginning, we may discover how one church and its ministers became superior to another, till, at length, by the most artful management on the one side, and the grossest neglect on the other, the claims of the bishop of Rome were extended through the western world, and stupidly received and submitted to by so many of his brethren.

In process of time these usurpations could no longer be endured; many of the errors which were propagated along with them were detected, and began to be openly opposed; and their opposers, from a famous protest which was made by a considerable body of them, were already known by the name of protestants.

Those who are acquainted with our history know that the distinguishing doctrines

trines of the protestants were early received and very strenuously asserted in this kingdom; so that Britain has, for a long time, been considered as the great support and bulwark of the reformed interest, and the object of the ill will and calumny of all the friends of popish usurpations.

It was not, however, to be expected that so great a design as the reformation from popery could be attempted without raising a mighty ferment; or executed, without meeting with much opposition. To confine our attention to our own country, the blood of many martyrs has been spilled; a protestant prince, succeeded by a popish one, who was a cruel bigot. When the throne was again filled by a friend to the reformation, plots were frequently formed, though constantly discovered and disappointed. In the next reign, the horrid design was formed of destroying the whole legislature at a blow, which it is one design of this day's meeting to commemorate. In the course of the same century, every thing dear to our fathers,

thers, both as Britons and as protestants, was threatened, and, doubtless, in imminent danger, by the succession of a popish prince to the throne of these kingdoms; when, by a wonderful and unlooked for revolution, the snare was broken, the fears of the nation removed, and such a security obtained for civil and religious liberty, as has preserved them to the present day; and will, I trust, through the blessing of God, continue to do so to the latest posterity.

By whatever names, then, others may call us, or however freely they may deal out their censures, it need not give us any disturbance, whilst we reflect that Jesus Christ and his apostles, and the virtuous reformers and friends of liberty, in all succeeding ages, have experienced the same treatment.

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The CONCLUSION which follows was preached
on the FIFTH of NOVEMBER 1781.

II. THE end of all is, that we unite in our praises and thanksgivings to Almighty God, and make a grateful mention of his goodness, to which we owe our civil and religious rights, and the preservation of them amidst all the attempts which have been made to wrest them out of our hands. It is not to ourselves that we take the merit; it is not to an arm of flesh that we attribute success; it is to God that we give the glory, humbly acknowledging, that if he had not been on our side, we should have fallen a prey into the hands of our enemies.

III. To this we should add our grateful recollections of those who, under God, have been the authors of the deliverances which have been wrought out for us. I need not draw out the list; you will easily do it for yourselves; and,
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whilst you revere the names of ancient patriots, who have stood forth as the champions of your rights, it will be your earnest wish, that you may never want successors of the same spirit in this island; but that the cause of civil and religious liberty may be dear to the present and the following age, and be effectually supported by our descendants through all succeeding generations. Need I add, that our earthly benefactors should be remembered, not as the authors of our blessings; not to subvert our piety to God, or to set our fellow-creatures in his place; but to have before our eyes examples which we may follow, according to our different situations and abilities.

But whatever we may think or say of the dead, we should not be unmindful of the living, who are friends to the same cause. God forbid that we should any of us be wanting in due affection and loyalty to our gracious sovereign on the throne. Whatever part we may take in the unhappy disputes which have brought such complicated

complicated evils on those who, as men, are still our brethren, and who were once our fellow-subjects, and which threaten such unhappy consequences to our native land, we shall preserve, I trust, a becoming regard to our king, and pay all due subjection to the decrees and ordinances of government.

I am well persuaded that those are the most hearty consistent friend to their king, as well as to their country, and take the most prudent measures for the prosperity and happiness of both, who are the temperate, but steady defenders of our excellent constitution, who constantly assert, and study to promote, the civil and religious rights of their fellow-subjects. I fear not, therefore, being charged with contradiction or inconsistency, by any attentive hearer, when I add, that our gratitude for the blessings of heaven should be attended with a care to use all the means which are put into our hands for their preservation and security. And whatever some zealots may pretend, this

is not preaching up faction, much less rebellion. It only means, that we are the constant friends of our king and country, by recommending those principles, and observing those practices, which will promote the glory and happiness of both.

What these principles will prescribe on particular occasions, I shall not take upon me to determine for any but myself alone. You must each of you judge for yourselves, and determine as shall to each appear most conducive to the good of the whole.

To conclude. To our endeavours, what ever they may be, let us add our hearty prayers to Almighty God, that, by his influence on the hearts, counsels, and actions of all men, he would so turn them, that no designs formed against our liberty may prosper; that he would direct those in authority to such measures, as may be most favourable to public tranquillity and prosperity, as may procure employment to the common people, and
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give success to all the efforts used for the common advantage. It is impossible that we should be a great or happy people but by righteousness alone. The endeavours and prayers, therefore, of the true friends of their country, will always have this for their principal object, that a general reformation of manners may take place; that where luxury and intemperance have reigned, sobriety may enter; that injustice, violence and oppression may be succeeded by integrity, truth and kindness; that religion may have its deserved honours among us; and the care of their families and the education of their children be so attended to by fathers and masters, that we may have the prospect of a wise and virtuous youth growing up to enjoy and defend the blessings which are transmitted to them, and that so our nation may continue to be a joy and praise in the earth.

These, perhaps, you will some of you consider as romantic expectations; and perhaps they are really so. But I shall

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surely be allowed to act agreeably to my office as a minister of the christian religion, in exhorting every individual to "put away his sins by repentance," and to manifest "his gratitude, by showing mercy to the poor," if thus our prosperity may be lengthened out. These virtues, whatever effect they may have on public affairs, will be the glory and happiness of individuals, and will lay a foundation for their present and everlasting happiness.

This CONCLUSION was substituted for the former, NOVEMBER 5, 1787.

Let it suffice that through the blessing of God on the efforts made for this purpose, we, who have the infelicity to dissent from the established church, enjoy, in a very considerable degree, the blessings of religious liberty. It ought not however, to be matter of surprise to our fellow-subjects, that, without wishing the least injury to any denomination of christians,

tians, we are anxious to obtain the enlargement of them, and, particularly, to free ourselves from any civil incapacities which our dissent brings upon us. Our religious principles, we are bold to say, have not any unfavourable aspect on society; and therefore should not expose those who receive them to the forfeiture of any civil rights.

As far as men have been the instruments of procuring us the privileges of protestants, and the liberties of dissenters from the national church, we revere their characters, we recite their praises with gratitude, but we in particular acknowledge our obligations to *his* goodness, who enlightens the understanding, and gives vigour to the hand of the steady patriot; and, with the spirit of devout gratitude, we will say, "what shall we render unto thee, O Lord, for all thy benefits?"

At the same time, however, that we commemorate our deliverance from the

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violence of persecutors, let us treat our brethren of every denomination, and of every church, with the utmost candour and tenderness. The violences of their ancestors are not to be imputed to the present generation, any further than they are now vindicated. The mutual forbearance and liberality of protestants must be a pleasing sight to all who are well affected to their cause and principles, and give the pleasing hope, that their united endeavours will establish the distinguishing doctrines of the reformation, the right of private judgment, and the sufficiency of the holy scriptures.

But I have to call upon you, my brethren, for a further exercise of your candour, even to those of the Roman Catholic church. To those who are acquainted with the names of GEDDES and BERINGTON, in that communion, with their writings, with the characters which they bear, and the generous sentiments which they profess, they ought to appear in the light of christian brethren, they should be received

ceived with respect; and to be encouraged in their schemes of usefulness, for the service of our common christianity. Let the protestants of the present day, therefore, forget the treatment given to their cause by the ancestors of these men; and whilst they observe, with a watchful eye, every design formed against our liberty, and especially every attempt upon it, receive with open arms, *all* those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

I fear drawing out this discourse to a length exceeding the usual limits of this service; but I cannot conclude, without further exhorting my hearers, while they express so much zeal for liberty, to keep at the utmost distance from *their* principles and practices, who would fix a perpetual yoke of bondage on a considerable part of the human species. For, what? shall we value ourselves on the liberty which we, Britons, enjoy as our birth-right, and for lucre's sake engage in a traffic, the professed object of which is to deprive human beings, to deprive

them, during their lives, of this privilege? Must the poor African, because he differs from the inhabitants of Europe in colour and feature, or because he is less acquainted with the arts of civilized life, be torn from his home and all his connections, and carried into a foreign and far distant country, without the least prospect of ever revisiting those places which are usually most dear to the human breast? Would God it could be said with truth, that these unhappy slaves, whose liberty is thus wrested from them, were placed in a situation which would, in the lowest degree, compensate for the unspeakable loss which they have sustained! But I will be silent on this subject, when I have said that the severe treatment which these poor creatures receive, may, perhaps, from a just indignation of the oppressor's cruelty, from a just compassion for the innocent sufferers, be, in some instances, exaggerated; but that, still, it is to be feared that the whip is in hands which too often use it most unmercifully; and that the calamity of slavery is enhanced,

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not alleviated, by the condition of it. Is there a man, is there a christian, who will enter into such scenes of guilt for the sake of gain? I will not stay to ask, what wealth can procure, to compensate for the injury done to the finest feelings of the human heart; but be bold to ask those who can answer the question, whether the trade which I am now considering be not a losing, instead of a gainful one; and whether it would not be for the interest of general commerce, that, if not immediately abolished, it should at least be gradually disused; that the importation of them into our colonies should immediately cease; that the present race, or at least their posterity, should be gradually emancipated, till they all become free; and that the correspondence with the African nations be henceforward for the exchange of commodities and manufactures, which would certainly tend to their civilisation, and, probably, to the advantage of all who are concerned with them.

But this is not the proper place for such inquiries: I could not, however, resist

resist the temptation of laying before you this interesting subject, for the information of those who may not, perhaps, know that a scheme is lately formed to take off this intolerable yoke from the necks of those who labour under it, and to wipe away the disgrace which it brings on this nation. A small pamphlet is lately published, under the title of "A Summary View of the Slave Trade," which I would recommend to your perusal, and which will, I think, encourage you to unite with the generous persons who are already engaged in the design.

I conclude with my hearty prayers, that the blessing of God may accompany this and every other charitable purpose of his servants, to the glory of his name in the happiness of his creatures. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING.

PREACHED BEFORE AN ASSEMBLY OF MINISTERS,

AT MANCHESTER, MAY 21, 1760.

ACTS vii. 22.

**AND MOSES WAS LEARNED IN ALL THE WISDOM OF
THE EGYPTIANS; AND WAS MIGHTY IN WORDS
AND IN DEEDS.**

WE have no very clear lights, by which to discover, in what the learning of the ancient Egyptians consisted. It is quite unnecessary on the present occasion to enter into any of the particulars of it, which have been handed down. The whole current of antiquity directs us to *this country* as being very early the seat of
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of learning and knowledge. There are instances on record of the wise men of other nations travelling hither for improvement.

It seems to be mentioned in my text with design to do honour to the character of Moses, that he was learned, or instructed, as the word signifies, in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. It is taken notice of plainly, as the foundation of those memorable actions, by which the early part of his life was distinguished. Hence, I see no impropriety in supposing, that the knowledge which he acquired in the schools of Egypt, was in part a qualification for the province which he afterwards held with so much dignity and usefulness, as the lawgiver, governor and leader of the Jewish people.

This however is certain, that the learning of ancient times at least, was designed to serve as a discipline for the most distinguished scenes of civil and social life. Such acquisitions, as the schools afforded,
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were a considerable part of the virtuous and manly education of future lawgivers, statesmen, and generals; and of all other persons, who were expected to be the supports and ornaments of the respective states, to which they belonged.

It is found to be true in fact, that those, who have made the most distinguished figure in the busy scenes of life, have often had a considerable share of those kinds of learning, which were most esteemed in their day. A slender acquaintance with the Grecian and Roman history will furnish a person with instances abundantly sufficient to confirm this observation.

This, then, it should seem, was the tendency of ancient learning. If that of modern times has had a different tendency; to what shall we ascribe it? Human nature is ever the same; and the grandeur and good order of civil societies in all ages depend on the same or on similar causes. If what has past for learn-

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ing therefore has ever appeared to operate differently; it must probably be, because it is of a different kind. The remedy for this is to be sought, not in the neglect of learning; but in a care to reform the abuses, which have crept into the sciences; and to restore those branches to their deserved honour, which have been the fruitful causes of so much order and happiness in private and social life.

It has been one very unhappy effect of such a change in the studies and pursuits of the learned, wherever it has taken place, that learning itself has fallen into contempt with the busy and active part of mankind. They have been apt to consider it, as only fit to fill the heads, and exercise the wits of idle people; but as of no use at all to those who are designed to fill up the more active stations, and serve their country in the faithful discharge of all the offices of peace and war.

Nay learning and knowledge have been represented, as not only useless, but hurtful;

hurtful ; as the means of corrupting the native manners of a brave people ; as the causes of idleness and effeminacy ; and as accessory to the extinction of that noble ardour for public liberty, which is their best security against all usurpation. Religion too has been thought to be in danger from the advancement of learning : and the torrent of infidelity and profaneness, which in some ages has been likely to bear down every thing great and good, has by some been reckoned to owe its rise, or at least a considerable increase to its streams, to the fountains of knowledge too freely laid open, and diffused in too general and undistinguishing a manner.

To judge of the truth and justness of these heavy charges, it will be necessary to take a view of the several kinds of learning ; that we may see whether they are all equally guilty ; or whether whilst false science is of a hurtful or dangerous tendency ; the true, is not, on the contrary, innocent, ornamental and useful.

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It will not be expected on the present occasion, that I should enter into a particular and distinct consideration of each of the objections referred to above. For besides that the limits assigned to this discourse will not admit of so extensive an undertaking, it is easy to refer to those who have answered them effectually; and particularly to an author of the highest character, who for strength of genius, and variety of knowledge has had perhaps no superior, and few equals. All that is proposed here is to take a very general view of the chief branches of learning; and briefly to hint at some of the advantages which will accrue from a just attention to them.

Language, which contains the elements of all learning and knowledge comes first to be considered. That the knowledge of words is necessary to diffuse science must be obvious to every one. But the study of foreign languages, the living and the dead, employs so much of our time, especially in the early part of life, that the consideration of it is not to be thus
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passed over. Why should any tongue but our own employ our attention is a question, which has been sometimes asked; and it is a question, which may be asked with more appearance of reason in this than in almost any preceding age, even by those who are friends to the sciences. We have, say they, a sufficient number of good authors on all subjects in our own tongue; and our time might be much better employed, in making ourselves masters of their sentiments, than in collecting words and phrases from other tongues; and searching with so much diligence for that, which will not, after all, repay the pains, which the search must cost us.

But the study of languages is not without its use. If it be properly pursued, it strengthens the capacities of the mind, and enlarges our experience. The comparison of different languages, with just critical remarks on their general agreement to the nature of things, and the powers of the human mind, and the

peculiarities observable in each, besides the entertainment it will afford to a curious observer, may prove the means of enriching our native tongue with that copiousness and variety, which will enable us to deliver our sentiments on all subjects with a superior strength and elegance.

Not to insist upon it, that languages are usually acquired at an age, when scarcely any thing else can be learnt; it may be added, if the experience and observation of other nations be worth any thing, it is very desirable, where we cannot collect them for ourselves, to take them from the words of the original authors.

There was a time, when the study of the languages was of the utmost importance. On the revival of learning, after a period of long and deplorable ignorance, the friends of knowledge and inquiry had no other resource, than to the valuable remains of the wise ancients. It is perhaps

haps nothing more than what justice will exact, to confess, that our subsequent improvements are in a great measure to be imputed to the diligence, with which their writings were studied, and the zeal employed in extending the knowledge of them.

There appears no present danger of our neglecting to acquire the knowledge of modern languages. Their importance to the continuance and enlargement of our commerce will secure them, at least, a just degree of attention; but neither can the ancient be safely neglected. If they are not so necessary at present as an avenue to the sciences, they will, at least, conduce to their wider extent and progress. Where we can compare the several ages and nations, in which they have been neglected or cultivated; we shall see that not only the state of their learning, but their other civil advantages have some dependance on the attention paid to these studies.

After all, it is readily owned, that the knowledge of words alone can be of little

significance. If any suffer them to engross their whole attention to the neglect of things, their folly and absurdity will deserve the severest censure. It is chiefly to gain the best access to the stores of knowledge, which are preserved amongst other nations, and particularly in the writings of ancient authors, that the languages are expected to engage our attention; and if we do not apply them to this use, we might almost as well have no acquaintance with them at all.

As then the only or chief use of learning any language is, that we may attain a just knowledge of things, it will be most natural next to consider the nature and uses of such knowledge as we are capable of acquiring.*

* On this subject Beattie's Defence of the Study of the classics is far from being contemptible. Cogan too has written a good pamphlet upon it. Their arguments Rush has to overthrow. The author of the diversions of Purley seems to have suggested a new system of language, totally subversive, at least, of that contained in Harris's Hermes. J. H.

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As to the knowledge of nature, in the confined sense, in which it is often taken for the knowledge of the visible, material world; our first acquaintance with her is owing to the impressions made on the senses by external objects. The representation of these on the mind is in some cases lively, strong and accurate; and in others weak and confused. Some are at the pains to collect and compare the impressions which they receive; to observe the changes, of which the several bodies around them are capable, and their different affections and properties with regard to one another. Others never go a single step beyond the particular impression which the mind receives; and, unless where the necessities of life exact a closer attention, are scarcely capable of recalling any impressions, which have formerly been present with the mind. These, it is obvious, must be quite strangers to the course and order of nature. If any knowledge of it is to be acquired, it must be in the former method.

The great misfortune is, that the conceit and prejudice of mankind will not suffer them to conduct their inquiries by the rules which nature prescribes. When a few observations have been made, a theory is immediately established; and then all the operations of nature are to be explained agreeably to it. The toil of a laborious investigation and slow deduction from a variety of experiments will not suit the natural rapidity of the greater part of mankind; and, rather than discover an excusable and modest ignorance, they will, by a precipitate determination, prevent all future inquiries and improvements.

True natural knowledge is of a very different kind from any thing which such men have invented, or can possibly invent. It consists in such an acquaintance with surrounding objects, as will enable us to apply them to the use and ornament of human life. This kind of knowledge is not to be acquired, but by the observation of things as they are, and the frequent

quent repetition of the most accurate experiments. This science, as it will draw very considerable improvements from the arts already practised, makes an ample return for the advantages which it receives. It is from this quarter, that the artist is furnished with materials, on which to employ his industry, and assisted to use his labour and skill to the greatest advantage. The study of nature supplies him with patterns of the easiest and best method of operation; enables him to do what is superior to his natural strength; and to compass what lies within the reach of his abilities in a more easy and expeditious manner.

Can it then ever be questioned whether researches of this kind are innocent and safe? Will it not be allowed, that they are highly useful? For besides the elegant and agreeable employment which they afford at a time of leisure; the relaxation which they give from severer studies; and their effect to extend and improve the powers of the mind: they enlarge,

as has been shown, the sphere of our activity; and frequently supply very powerful motives to that general industry, which is most friendly to the human constitution; and spread through the several societies of mankind that decency and good order which are the causes of so many private and public blessings.

It is a further advantage of these studies, that by a more exact acquaintance with particular natures, we shall be enabled to perceive the connection of some of the greatest parts of the universe; so as to convince us of the good design, which prevails throughout all nature; and lead to that full persuasion of the power, wisdom and goodness of the Supreme Being, which will fit us to celebrate his perfections, and engage in the other offices of religion with knowledge and understanding.

Whilst that kind of philosophy then, which is built on fine-spun theories, is useless and vain; that which proceeds on experiments,

experiments, by its connection with the useful and ornamental arts; and by the arguments which it supplies for the existence and perfections of God, has the most agreeable aspect on the best interests of mankind.*

The different methods, in which moral inquiries have been carried on, will, in like manner, give us occasion to lament the ill effects of false, and represent the advantages of true science. The dry and abstract manner of considering moral subjects, abounding with needless subtilties and refinements, has, it is acknowledged, been too common in the schools of learning; and the effects have been such, as might be expected. Those, who have been esteemed the greatest masters in this way, when they have come to speak or write on moral subjects for the instruction and benefit of the world, have ac-

* According to the maxims of Bacon and the practice of Newton, natural philosophy has been most successfully studied and taught, especially by Priestley, who has been justly called the father of experimental knowledge. J. H.

quitted

quitted themselves so poorly; and done such little service to the cause of virtue with the many definitions and nice distinctions, in which they had been instructed; that the more sensible part of mankind have easily despised their learned and laborious inquiries; and applied themselves to other masters for the knowledge which they required. The natural, undisguised eloquence of those, who have just described the genuine sentiments of their own hearts; and discovered that warm approbation of integrity, compassion, and the other virtues, which they naturally raise in an honest mind, is far more agreeable to a person of a good taste, than more accurate compositions of an abstract and metaphysical nature.

But these speculations are not only generally disagreeable, and always useless, but subtilties in morals have sometimes had a yet more unhappy effect; and have led those who have been fondest of them, even to deny or question the reality of all moral obligation. Thus they have refined

refined on the theory of morals, till they have destroyed or greatly weakened all the motives to the practice of virtue.

Indeed it cannot be denied, this cold, unedifying manner of considering a subject, which is designed to excite the warmest approbation, to engage the most steady affection, and to employ all the active powers of our nature, is very likely to hurt, instead of improving our moral capacities. When that noble ardour of mind, which virtue should raise, is thus extinguished; we need not wonder if it be succeeded by indifference about it, or even by a secret suspicion of its reality.

But there are other ways of considering this great and interesting subject, to which it is the business of true science to direct us. The profound speculations of schoolmen may perhaps have this use, to teach us a more precise and determined expression. When they have rendered us this service, we have nothing further to expect from all their pompous labours. In
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some instances indeed they have brought us under a kind of necessity of treating the subject in a manner familiar to their own. It is frequently convenient, before we proceed to establish the truth, to confute such false opinions as appear inconsistent with it. Where these have long been upheld by the aid of metaphysical reasonings, the best and most effectual method of confutation may be by the use of the same method of reasoning; but when the former edifice is thus taken down, and the rubbish removed, we shall raise the goodly building with other materials, and in a far different manner.

As in the heart and life of man, we shall best discover what we would know on the subject of morals; so our acquaintance, with this part of nature as with every other, will be best improved by experience and observation. Whether virtue hath its foundation in the understanding, or in an implanted sense, as it is a question of inferior consequence, so
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it seems quite foreign to my present design. As the first principles of it are certainly to be sought in human nature; so the knowledge of its obligations must be acquired by a strict attention to what the author of our nature has written on the table of our hearts.

Our first knowledge of the principles and affections of the human heart is drawn from experience; but it is not so safe perhaps to trust entirely to our own consciousness: we must look abroad into the world, in order to discover the sentiments and affections of others: and as there is danger of being misled by confining our views to the manners of a particular age or place, it is necessary to take a larger view; and, by the study of history, to supply the narrowness of our own particular and personal observation.

In conversing with the scenes, with which history presents us, we have just and striking pictures of the several virtues and vices: they raise our most natural sentiments:

sentiments; the generous principles of the human mind have full room to exert themselves; and our praise and censure follow those actions, to which they respectively belong. This is instructing in virtue in the truest and best sense; it turns our attention to what is most just and worthy; and at the same time confirms us in the love of it. Fiction is not without its use; but true history more especially is attended with this advantage. The writers of fiction are very apt to represent mankind according to their own notions: the characters, as well as the events, are often the work of the imagination alone: and they are invented rather to serve some particular purpose, or to support some odd opinion, than to lead us to the knowledge of the human heart. But the wise and grave historian, who really intends to instruct us in what is past, will be the most likely to draw from the life, and to delineate the actions and characters of men according to their true nature.

Who

Who can pretend to deny the advantage of such studies? Whilst the philosopher coldly instructs, if he does indeed instruct us, in the nature of good and evil, and the obligations of virtue: in the delightful pages of a just history, we meet with that, which warms and elevates the mind, and disposes to an honourable and worthy conduct.

The great merit of this kind of knowledge consists in its extensive use and application. It contains the duties of a man and a citizen, and all the important offices of peace and war. By this states are formed and governed; and all the rights of governors and subjects properly adjusted.*

From this entertaining and excellent study, we proceed by an easy gradation to

* If there had been less casuistry in Paley's Moral Philosophy, it would have appeared almost an unparalleled treatise. At present there is nothing to equal Hartley's Rule of Life. Yet perhaps there is not a better test of virtue, than its public, universal, permanent utility. J. H.

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what is in a more peculiar sense divine and religious. "It would be well for us," says a noble writer, "if, before we ascended into the higher regions of divinity, we would vouchsafe to descend a little into ourselves, and bestow some poor thoughts on plain honest morals." Our minds, when tinctured with just notions of good and evil, and filled with a true sense of what is most excellent and lovely in human nature, will proceed to the contemplation of the first great cause well prepared to conceive of his inflexible truth, impartial justice, and everlasting mercy; or, to express them all in one, his perfect goodness. We shall see on better evidence, that his commandments are holy, just and good; that his administration is most righteous; and that the greatest good of the whole is the end of all his appointments.

The last and highest improvement of the mind in the present state may be expected from the study of the holy scriptures. As the advantages of true science
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in other respects have been considered already: it will be expected with the highest reason, that I consider a little the assistance it will afford us here.

In the first place, there are none who may not see the greatest use of a critical knowledge in the languages, in which they are written. Without this they could never have been translated at all; and now, that we have them in our own tongue, it is still highly convenient to trace up the streams to the fountain from which they spring, that we may be convinced of their integrity and judgment, who have undertaken and executed this laborious task: or that we may discover and correct their errors.

Though the study of nature in the visible works of creation, may not appear to have any immediate connection with the knowledge of the scriptures; yet as far as it tends to give us juster sentiments of the divine perfections and character, it plainly appears subservient to the interests

of natural, and consequently of revealed religion. Besides, the sacred writers so constantly refer us to this source of divine knowledge, that they seem to consider an acquaintance with the book of nature, as at least a desirable qualification in those, who come to the study of divine revelation. Certainly such as have never given much attention to the instances of a wise contrivance, and the effects of paternal goodness in the works of creation; as their notions of Deity will be less clear, distinct and strong: so neither will they enter so well into the meaning of those texts of scripture, in which the knowledge of the invisible things of God is said to be declared or manifested by his visible works. Once more, as the scriptures are full of the natural, as well as civil history of the age and country, in which they were written; with this preparatory knowledge we shall be better fitted to read them with understanding. If we find their descriptions of the face of nature, and the several objects which it presents, to be just and accurate; it will

will increase the other evidence, which we have of the authenticity of the sacred books; and prepare us to give a more entire assent to the truth of the whole revelation.

But nothing will be so just a preparative for scripture learning, as the study of human nature, and that rich variety of moral and divine knowledge, which is connected with it. This furniture of the mind will give us large and comprehensive views of the design of revelation, and effectually secure us from the danger of perverting it to the purposes of tyranny and superstition. As it is supposed to come from God, we shall easily conclude, that the ends and purposes of it must be agreeable to his essential perfections; and as it is intended for the use of man, that it is fitted to improve and perfect the highest powers of the human mind. Hence we shall naturally direct our thoughts to affairs of greater moment, than any minute trifling criticisms on particular parts; and consider its general

grand tendency, and the excellent means which it employs to attain its most useful purposes.*

I have thus been attempting to show, that the improvements of learning are not only innocent but useful; and that they have a nearer or more remote connection with what is most important and valuable in human life.

They have their use in all kinds of societies, whether civil or religious. Though the latter, more especially, have sometimes dreaded unhappy effects from a spirit of literature, and from the advancement of learning; the wise and consistent friends of religion have judged very differently. The design of Pope Gregory I. to destroy the valuable remains of heathen learning was generally condemned even by holy men. Or if the friends of religion were so weak as to imagine that

* May I be permitted to recommend Harmer's Observations, as affording some of the best helps for the right understanding of the scriptures? J. H.

human

human learning would be any prejudice to their cause, its enemies knew better; and one of the wisest of them, the emperor Julian plainly discovered his sentiments of the advantage which christianity might receive from the learning and knowledge of those who professed it, when he prohibited them either to teach or learn the sciences. This, he plainly appears to have thought a more powerful engine to beat down the strength and influence of the christians, and to demolish their cause, than the more cruel and sanguinary methods of his predecessors. This species of persecution has since been copied by christians against each other in more nations than one. The historian Am. Marcellinus, though an heathen and a great admirer of the emperor Julian, reckoned it inconsistent with all justice and humanity. It is mentioned here only to show the opinion which men have generally had of the advantages of learning; and of the prejudice which every cause would receive from its neglect and disuse.

Let it be allowed, that learning is not of absolute necessity, to such a competent knowledge of the duties of religion, and the offices of virtue, as will make a man a very worthy and useful member of society. We depend not on instruction for the knowledge of right and wrong. The chief instances of duty and obedience bring with them such a recommendation from God himself, who has adapted the powers and principles of the human mind to his most holy laws, that it is generally impossible we should be ignorant of them, or of the obligations under which they bring us. In matters of science, the efforts of a great genius, who has none of the aids of learning, and draws from his own stock, rather than the writings of others, will have something more great and noble, than the exacter productions of scholars, with all the aids which reading and learning can supply. But it is easy to observe, that the natural dispositions to virtue may be improved by good rules; and the way to true wisdom made plainer and easier by the ministry of instruction.

struction. It is justly observed by Cicero, that there have been many who have risen to an high pitch of excellence without learning, and by a kind of divine habit in their natures have approved themselves just and wise. I add this too, says he, that nature oftener attains glory and excellence without learning, than learning without nature: but, when to an excellent and noble nature, there is added the method and discipline of instruction; then will the mind exert all its latent powers, and rise to a singular perfection and excellence.

It is very agreeable to consider the illustration, which the foregoing theory will receive from the history of mankind. The usefulness of learning and knowledge appears from the happy condition of the states, by which they have been cultivated, and from the many evils, which have grown up when the sciences have been despised or neglected. Though this subject has not been entirely overlooked, yet it seems to deserve the more particular

consideration of such, as are capable of doing justice to it.

Though I cannot propose to myself so large a design; it may be worth our while just to reflect on the state of things, in those times, when ignorance so universally prevailed, and the very records and monuments of past improvements were involved in one common ruin; and on the changes, which took place, when the interests of learning began once more to be attended to. It is not so easy perhaps to assign the causes of that ignorance, which overspread so many parts of Europe; and even those countries, which had been distinguished by the encouragement which they gave to the pursuits of learning. It has often been imputed to the incursions of the northern nations; and it may be easily believed, that their condition and manner of life were not very favourable to literary improvements. The wars which they occasioned, in the countries into which they entered, would be apt to give a new turn to the thoughts
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and inclinations of their inhabitants. Though their enemies may have exceeded, in their accounts of their fierceness and cruelty, yet it will be allowed, I suppose, through ignorance or malice, they frequently destroyed the remains of ancient learning. But still there were other causes of this vast change, which had their effect, though they operated in a more gradual and silent manner. The trifling controversies, which had infested the christian world; the zeal, with which they had been carried on; and the absurd opinions, which had been frequently established by great and venerable councils, had greatly injured the cause of true learning, as well as of real christianity; and through the vanity, presumption and uncharitableness of those, who had professed to teach, the people were but too well prepared for a state of great and general ignorance. But whatever the causes of it might be, the effect which it had on the valuable interests of mankind were such as must reflect the greatest honour on the sciences. It was in these
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dark and ignorant ages that those opinions were received, and those customs established, which are the greatest disgrace to human nature, and the fruitful causes of confusion and misery in society. This was the time, when the grand corruption of christianity, which began to work so early, grew so prodigiously as to infect all its parts; and when the chief of those malignant disorders, which have since threatened its very vitals, begun, or greatly increased. It was in this age, that chains were forged, with which to bind the understandings and consciences of men; and the chief absurdities and impieties, with which the christian world has been since burdened, received their establishment.

These were the unhappy effects of ignorance and barbarity. When in the course of human affairs the interests of learning were again attended to, there were proportionable improvements in civil and social life. The arts grew in repute; the fierce natures of men were softened

softened and refined; and just and regular forms of government, and the due administration of public justice succeeded to the former disorder and confusion.

But it was in religion, that the happy effects of the revival of learning were most observable. Mankind, though long accustomed to the absurdities and follies of ignorance and darkness, when light broke in upon them, began to see how grossly they had been imposed upon; and to feel the weight of those chains, with which they had been bound. The sweets of knowledge made them desirous to extend it; and the spirit of free inquiry which was encouraged on other subjects, inclined them to examine what they had been taught in religion; and to search for the original and foundation of received practices. The issue of this has been, such a reformation in the christian world, as must do honour to the age in which it was begun; and will do honour to every age, which shall have the resolution

tion and integrity to continue and perfect it.

How greatly the revival of learning has contributed to bring about this happy event is abundantly evident. In our own country in particular, our improvements in learning, and the reformation in religion, as well as the other valuable blessings of social life appear to have advanced with equal steps. The comparison of our own with other countries is extremely difficult to be executed with any degree of impartiality. But we need not be afraid of saying, that this nation has at least had its share of great and learned men: and been distinguished by a more general application to the sciences than many others. Is there any nation, where the arts, which serve to the use and ornament of human life have been pursued with more success? do not our excellent form of government, the security of public liberty, the regular administration of justice, and all the blessings of domestic and private life, with which we are

are favoured, bear a most clear testimony to the advantages, which learning and knowledge bring? Above all, the happy progress which the reformation has made; the care and diligence with which the scriptures have been studied; the honour, which christianity has received from the candid and just representations, which have been given of its design; and the just foundations on which the authority of it have been placed; are certain proofs that true science, at least, has a most favourable aspect on its interests; and that the injuries which it received in an ignorant and barbarous age are effectually redressed by the increase of real knowledge.

But whatever may have been done already, to promote useful knowledge in these nations, and to gain the many great and noble blessings which are connected with it; there is still room for our labours, if we can do any thing which may be the means of enlarging our acquisitions; or, at least, of preserving those, which have been already made.

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This is a point, which deserves the particular attention of christian ministers. There have been times, in which many of this order have found it their interest to keep the people in ignorance and discourage inquiry. Their doctrines would not bear to be examined; their chief emoluments arose from the credulity, ignorance and superstition of their followers; and their curious fabric was sure to fall, as soon as the foundations, on which it rested, should be discovered. This mean and interested policy in those, who pass for instructors, is justly condemned at all times. It shows a poor, narrow spirit to oppose the advancement of learning upon any such considerations. But it is often as politic, as it is just and fit in itself to espouse the cause of learning, and to list ourselves in the number of its declared friends.

It seems peculiarly necessary in the present age, in which a regard to learning, and a desire to make some proficiency in it, is become so universal, that
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the ministers of the christian religion should be distinguished by that kind of learning, at least, which more immediately relates to the ministerial office. And here what shall I say? that it will be a means of extending our credit and influence with our people; of removing or lessening the prejudices of our enemies; and promoting the honour of that particular denomination by which we are distinguished; I will say what is much more, that it will conduce to our becoming the wise, consistent advocates of truth and virtue, and the friends of mankind. In a word, next to integrity of heart and purity of manners, I can hardly think of a more desirable accomplishment in a christian minister, than a good and well improved understanding.

Our yearly meetings afford us a good opportunity of considering the best means of promoting good learning and true religion; and if they are at any time past over without any serious attempts for this purpose, one great end of them appears
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to be defeated. The most effectual way of attaining this end, I shall leave to the consideration of those of a longer standing in the ministry.

We need the concurrence of all orders in a design of such importance; and it will not be judged improper to recommend it to all, who are hearty in the interests of religion and virtue, to apply their thoughts to this subject; and show themselves the friends of knowledge and inquiry.

If you, our hearers, discover a generous freedom in controverted points; if you are willing to give up ancient errors; if you encourage all just attempts to remove from christianity every corrupt addition; and to clear it of those incumbrances, which so visibly obstruct its progress and influence; you will strengthen the hands of your ministers, and encourage them to seek with more diligence and cheerfulness all the improvements of sound, useful learning;

learning; and to lay before you from time to time the result of their impartial inquiries.

To conclude; The best way of showing yourselves the friends of learning will be by a generous attention to the liberal education of youth. It is from the accomplishments and character of the younger part, that we are to expect under God to enlarge, or even to preserve, the stock of knowledge, which is put into our hands. If we neglect the culture and improvement of young minds; if we suffer their capacities to be ruined by idleness, or to be dissipated by pleasure; if we only train them up in the arts of gain, without any care to instruct them in good learning, and possess their minds with useful knowledge; the next age will of course degenerate from the present; and unless the providence of God interpose, we shall sink again into that state of ignorance and barbarity, from which we have happily emerged. But if we bring them up in an early attention to

real, valuable knowledge; and happily succeed in our endeavours to enrich their minds with this noble furniture, the prospect is fair and inviting. We may reasonably hope, that our present blessings will be continued and increased, that commerce will flourish, that public liberty will be established on an immovable foundation, that christianity will attain its deserved honours, and gradually extend its influence, till it becomes the joy of the whole earth.

There are few here, who need to be informed of a design lately entered upon in this neighbourhood for the liberal education of youth, and of the encouragement which it has received.* That the accomplishment of all the purposes of such an institution is not to be expected in the beginning is readily acknowledged; and it is hardly to be expected that every thing which may be desired and designed

* Here the author refers to an academy established at Warrington in the year 1757, which continued till the year 1785. J. H.

will

will immediately be put into execution. The efforts of an infant society, which has the best supports, will of course be feeble. There must be time allowed, before we can expect it to attain its full strength and maturity. It is some satisfaction however to think, that a fair attempt is made to serve the cause of human and sacred learning, to train up youth for the christian ministry, and for the other important offices of life. It is some satisfaction that so considerable a progress has already been made in it; and it will be a worthy object of the united efforts of all good men to secure the honour and success of such an institution.

Shall I say it will do honour to dissenters, and be a means of strengthening their cause, to engage with united counsels in a scheme which is designed, not to serve a particular party, not to promote any peculiar and distinguishing notions; but to propagate sound learning, to extend real, useful knowledge, and to

lead to the security of all our private and public blessings? It will be your greatest honour, and a probable means of strengthening your interest, and increasing your influence in society. But I would not willingly suppose, that these will be the most prevailing motives with you. There are so many other and greater, which may be fitly used on this occasion; that I will venture to recommend it to your attention for its own sake, as designed to serve the general interests of mankind; and to promote truth, virtue and happiness.

These are the great and animating motives, which should engage our hearty concurrence in every just scheme for the liberal education of youth. Let it not discourage any, that the success is doubtful, that the difficulties with which the execution of it will be attended, are obvious and sure, but the means by which they are to be overcome more remote and uncertain. Something may be done, the united counsels, and efforts
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of numbers will have proportionable effects; and, it is not to say, what vigour and resolution, under the direction of prudence, may be able to accomplish.

Of this however we may be assured, that those who are sincere in their endeavours to serve the cause of sound learning and useful knowledge, by concurring in the scheme referred to above, or engaging in any other, which they shall think more likely to attain these ends, in whatever way it shall operate, will have the satisfaction of designing well, and will deserve the esteem and thanks of all good men.

Permit me just to add my unfeigned wish, that nothing may ever appear in those, who have the ornament of a good and well-improved understanding, which may fasten a disgrace, or occasion any unworthy reflections on the cause of learning. But to the other endowments of the mind, may there always be added the good dispositions of the heart; and may the

the progress which we make in knowledge serve to establish us in the love of virtue, and the practice of true piety; and so conduce to our present honour and comfort, and our everlasting happiness.

THE

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING

ON THE

CHARACTER, OFFICES
AND QUALIFICATIONS

OF THE

CHRISTIAN PREACHER.

GREAT part of the following discourse was delivered, as a charge, at what is called the ordination of some dissenting ministers, or on an occasion, when their brethren met to welcome them to their places, to pray for their welfare and for that of their respective congregations, and to suggest hints of advice for the benefit of both. It contains a fair account of the author's notions towards the close of his life. It points out the uses of natural and civil history. It strongly recommends the study of morals. It distinguishes between natural and revealed religion. It shows the impropriety and impolicy of religious establishments, of creeds, articles and tests. It gives a good general account of the Jewish and Christian religion, of the Old and New Testament. It represents the advantages arising from the miracles and prophecies recorded in the Bible. It conveys the freest and most philosophical sentiments on the subject of inspiration. Lastly, it proves christianity to be purely of a moral nature, not intended so much to furnish speculations for the head, as to apply the motives and sanctions of virtue and piety, of purity and benevolence, suggested by the gospel, to the heart. In this view of it, it may be considered as a good summary of useful knowledge. Nor are the recommendations, towards its close, to cultivate unaffected oratory and genuine politeness, to acquire valuable wisdom, and to adorn the gospel by good dispositions and good lives, unworthy the particular attention of christian ministers.

“ After this work was sent to the press, (wrote the author in his own copy) it was thought adviseable, that, on account of its length, it should be divided into sections. It obviously divides itself into three parts, according as the objects are to instruct, persuade and delight. The first is contained in the first section, the second in the eight following, and the third in the next section. If the piece had been thus divided, as the author would have chosen, the discourse would have included the introduction, the first part, the second part, the third part and the conclusion, any of which might have been subdivided into sections, if necessary.” J. H.

S E R M O N X I I .

TITUS ii. 15.

THESE THINGS SPEAK AND EXHORT.

THE INTRODUCTION.

THE institutions of religious worship are the great instruments, which the providence of God employs, for the moral and religious improvement of mankind: the manner, in which they are observed, must therefore be a general concern; and the character and conduct of the persons who are chosen to conduct them, must be highly interesting to all the members of religious societies. For this reason, it is hoped, the account which I propose now to give of the qualifications and offices of the christian preacher, will engage

engage the attention of christians in general. Though it merits the particular regard of those who are called to preach, yet it may be of use to all, by serving to regulate their expectations from their ministers, and to secure a proper attention to their persons and services.

The employment itself will naturally point out its end, to those who consider the connection which it has with the christian religion. This institution having no other aim, than to promote the holiness of those who submit to it, its preachers will of course direct all their endeavours to this purpose. In other words, the improvement of virtue amongst his hearers, will be the great object of the ministrations of the christian preacher.

With this idea of the design of the office, I cannot but think highly of it; and must reckon those, who enter into it with just sentiments, to be worthy of some peculiar regard. It is the most useful, and therefore the most honourable business,

business, in which any person can be concerned; and he must be of a low and groveling disposition, who has slight notions of the office itself, or of those, who with right views engage in it. All the friends of virtue and religion approve of this cause, have a high esteem for those who faithfully apply themselves to its support, and unite in wishing them success.

PART I.

THE preacher himself, under the influence of this opinion of the objects of his ministry, will naturally fall into that strain of preaching which is most favourable to them; and pursue those studies, and seek that kind of knowledge, which will qualify him to give the justest views of the christian character, and to persuade his hearers to a "conversation agreeable to the gospel of Christ."

In

In particular, this will incline him to the choice of such subjects for his public discourses, as have the best moral tendency. As the only foundation of a virtuous character is a just idea of its nature, he will not fail to use his best endeavours to this purpose. Every one who wishes to acquire it himself, or to assist others in forming or improving it, will be particularly careful, that his conceptions of the subject be as clear and precise as possible.

In order to this, he should have an accurate knowledge of the human mind and of the influence which a just discipline will have on its improvement and perfection. For the mind which is the most improved, which makes the nearest approaches to the excellence for which it was intended, is clearly the most virtuous, the most holy, the most like to God, or by whatever other name perfection of character may be expressed. To this general knowledge of the character should be added, such a distinct conception

tion of the several virtues, of their true nature, and offices, as will enable him easily to distinguish them from one another, and to perceive the effect which they severally have, to form that beauty and excellence, which is the end of morality, and of religion itself with all its institutions.

Hence it naturally follows, that the preacher should pay a very particular attention to such studies, as will increase his knowledge of human nature, and as will direct to the most useful methods of cultivating the virtues of the human mind. It will also be very desirable to have at hand a just definition of every particular virtue. This will qualify him, as there shall be occasion, to give a precise and clear description of every one, so as not to confound it with any other, or to leave out any thing which is necessary to the full comprehension of it.

For the same reason that the preacher studies these things himself, he will take every

every proper opportunity to explain them in his discourses; that those who hear, having a clear view of the path which they have to tread, may enter upon it with confidence, and proceed therein with increasing satisfaction. Thus will it be "like the shining light, which
"shineth more and more unto the perfect
"day;" and those who frequent it, will have the distinguishing ornaments of a good understanding and a well-furnished mind.

But let me not be mistaken; I would not be understood to recommend an abstruse method of preaching. The plainest subjects should always be preferred in public discourses; and the manner of treating them be as obvious and familiar, as the seriousness and dignity of religious worship will admit. But plainness and accuracy are by no means inconsistent: there may be all the exactness which true logic prescribes, where there is nothing of the form of it. In a discourse, however, which is to be heard only, it may be

be convenient to amplify and illustrate in a more diffuse manner, than would be necessary, if it were to be read ; and sometimes even to repeat what has been already delivered. Nothing, in short, should be omitted by the preacher, which may conduce to give those, to whom he addresses himself on such important points, a clear idea of the subject which he is laying before them ; so as to enable them, if attentive, to distinguish it from every other, and to perceive what particular duty is recommended to their practice. Thus, when he proceeds to the affectionate or pathetic parts of the discourse, and uses that earnest persuasion, to which a practical sermon will naturally direct him, he will not leave his hearers any room to complain, that very powerful motives have been laid before them, and great earnestness used ; but that they cannot discover to what the speaker intends to incline them.

This is the instruction, which his hearers may expect from the christian preacher

preacher—the true nature of the virtues which they should cultivate, and their offices in the several relations of life.

It will be easy to conclude from what has been said, that I would recommend it to a minister, to discourse frequently on the duties of social, relative, and domestic life; and yet I think it necessary to point them out in a more particular manner, as these are subjects, which are not so often considered, as their vast importance requires. They are not, I confess, the easiest kind of compositions; they require at least as much study and attention as almost any other; and there may be some danger, in descending to particulars, of appearing to point at individuals or their families. The difficulty of treating on these duties is, however, no sufficient reason for excluding them from our public discourses; but should engage us to consider them very attentively, and to enter into the necessary detail with great caution and prudence. With the help of these hints,
even

even a young preacher, who has some little knowledge of the world, and is of a delicate turn of mind, may do justice to subjects of this sort without disgusting any of his hearers, and so as to afford instruction to all. But whether it will be better to do this by particular set discourses on the duties of persons in the several relations of life; or by applying general subjects to their particular use, as they shall appear to suit their situation and circumstances; or whether both methods should be adopted, must be left to the prudence of every minister to determine.

This is one part of the duty of a christian preacher; to give a just description of the temper and character which the professors of the christian religion should maintain: but the more important and the more difficult part still remains to be considered, which is, to persuade them to cultivate virtuous dispositions, and to act under their influence.

PART II.

§ I.

It is the business of every public speaker both to instruct and to persuade. That he speak with clearness and precision, is so indispensable, that he cannot hope for the least success without it: but it is only preparatory to what should be his chief object, to move the affections, and determine the will. The artist should understand the principles of the art which he is to follow, the works which it is designed to produce, and the instruments which it uses, before he can, with any propriety, apply them; but this will not be sufficient to incite his industry and application, without a view of the probable advantages or honours which will attend the prosecution. The politician should learn what measures will secure this or the other purpose, the probable consequences of alliances or wars, and the like; but in order to influence him in
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action, he must see the connection which they have with his particular views, and their tendency to the accomplishment of his designs.

It is the same with those who undertake to speak on the highest of all arts, that of carrying the powers of the human mind to their greatest perfection. This being laid down as the end, and the means conducive to it represented; what naturally follows, in order to the accomplishment of the speaker's intention, is to give such a view of the end itself, or the several progressive steps by which it may be gained, as will incite to action, encourage every generous effort, and engage that perseverance which may be effectual to the ultimate purpose.

The speaker, who has not taken some such view as this of the employment, and learnt to distinguish between instruction and persuasion, can have no great prospect of success, on whatever subjects he undertakes to speak; and least of all, per-

haps, as a preacher of religion, where bare instruction will have exactly the same significance as knowledge without practice.

As to the topics of persuasion, to which the christian orator should have recourse, the advice which some give is to insist much on the native beauty and excellence of virtue, and to represent it as the great instrument of happiness to the human race, which the righteous Governor of the world employs to bless mankind, and to make them blessings to each other: thus, say they, will men be formed to sincere disinterested virtue, and learn to exercise their benevolent affections, not with a view to their own private advantage, but to that of their fellow creatures: if, on the contrary, you enlarge on the advantages which will accrue to themselves from their virtue; or on the rewards annexed to it in the present or the future world, there is some danger, lest, by promoting a selfish, mercenary temper, you corrupt the mind instead of improving

ing it, and encourage a view to private interest, till nothing generous or worthy of reward remain.

With what zeal and vehemence some declaim against this method of preaching, and with what contempt it is spoken of by others, is well known. Their advice to the young preacher is, "Leave these subjects to the philosophers, in whom they will be more becoming; but let your arguments and motives be drawn from religion, from the will and authority of God, from the peculiar doctrines of the christian religion, from the example of Christ, and from the important sanctions of future rewards and punishments."

But what occasion is there to omit either? Or where is the prudence of undervaluing any method of address, which has the least tendency to promote a holy or virtuous temper? Can there be any thing wrong in endeavouring to persuade our christian brethren, that the course, to which we direct them, is most reasonable

and becoming, agreeable to their nature, and the highest improvement of their moral powers? Is it not serving the cause of virtue to show, that it is the perfection of the human mind; and that it leads to the most pleasing, useful exercise of the high capacities with which we are distinguished? It is right likewise to represent it as the restorer of a corrupt, depraved nature; and as supplying the most effectual cure of the disorders which vice has introduced. The fault does not lie in insisting on these particulars; but in confining ourselves to them; and omitting the more interesting and affecting arguments, which religion in general, and especially the christian religion, supplies.

Nor does there appear to be any just ground for the apprehension, that the cause of virtue will be injured by showing, that it secures the highest advantages to those who practise it. It would bring some reflection on virtue itself, or on the righteous Governor of the world, if the general course and order of events were

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not favourable to the happiness of those who are the most excellent of their species: and it would be strange indeed, if a revelation from God, which should contain the discovery of any extraordinary blessings in the present, or in a future state, did not annex them to those qualities, which we universally approve in ourselves and others. It appears then to be a plain matter of fact, and to have every confirmation which the sacred scriptures can give it, that some peculiar advantages, present and future, are annexed to the virtuous character; and there cannot surely be any inconvenience in holding it up to the attention of mankind. What the christian religion teaches with regard to the present, and especially the future rewards of those who keep the commandments of God, is so well known, as to make it unnecessary to add any thing in proof of it.

It may appear surprising, that there should be this difference of opinion on so interesting a subject; and that the real

friends of virtue (for this I suppose to be the case) should differ so widely in the methods which they take for its support. Those who have no good-will to religion, are sometimes strenuous advocates for virtue; and for this reason, perhaps, some of the loudest declaimers for religion have been fond of decrying moral virtues. That such opposite opinions of virtue and religion should lead to different ways of explaining and enforcing their respective offices, cannot be matter of just surprise; and it may, perhaps, be a sufficient explanation of a similar diversity amongst those who are hearty friends to both these interests, that it has happened in consequence of their being nearer to one or the other of the extremes, which have just been described.

But there is another, and perhaps a better account to be given of this extraordinary fact, that good men have taken such very different methods to support the same cause. Those who are acquainted with the state of opinions in the
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christian church in the present and past ages, do not need to be informed, that a very great stress has been laid on the argument for a future state of rewards and punishments, from the unequal distribution of good and evil which it was thought appeared in the present. This argument being once introduced, the friends of the truth, which it was intended to support, believed it impossible to lay too great weight upon it, or to carry it too far. Hence it is, that so much has been said on the advantages of vice, and the evils of virtue, in the present state, as to leave it almost doubtful whether of the two were in itself more eligible. It naturally occurred to the wiser friends of religion, that some of its advocates were in danger of injuring it, by the very attempts which they made for its support. They were apprehensive, that so tragical a display of present disorders, could afford no good presumption of future order; and that, if virtue were not worthy of our choice for its own sake, there could be no reasonable hope of its receiving any extraordinary

dinary reward in the present, or in any future period of our existence. The natural consequence of this would be, that on one side, virtue would be enforced by the consideration of its native excellence; and on the other, by the hope of the future rewards annexed to it: and the advocates for each, would, perhaps, go greater lengths in their respective opinions, in consequence of their mutual opposition.

But whatever they may determine on the question, Whether the distributions of Providence in this life will lead us to expect another? it must be matter of grief to good men, to see the friends of virtue and practical religion so much inclined to depreciate each other's arguments, and methods of address. Is it indeed to be feared, lest too many or too powerful arguments should be urged, to persuade to the duties of a good life? All that can be done in every way, will be little enough to restrain the irregularities of the human will, to bring the passions

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into subjection, and to dispose men to a just and regular conduct.

I will not scruple, therefore, to recommend it to the christian preacher, to introduce into his discourses every enforcement of virtue, which shall offer itself; and to undervalue no argument, which shall appear to conduce, in how low a degree soever, to the moral improvement of his hearers.

What has been said of the duties of religion, will lead to the proper use, and right study of its doctrines. The easiest, best view which can be given of them, is to represent them as the grand motives by which the precepts of religion are enforced. Thus shall we clearly determine their respective importance, and the stress which should be laid on them in our public discourses; for the value of every truth is, its influence on the temper and behaviour of those who receive it. It is impossible, however, that religious truths should be applied to their proper use, till

till we know what they are; so that it is incumbent on every one, who wishes to improve his character thereby, to study them with all diligence: and this is more especially the concern of the christian preacher, who will have so many calls to lay them before his hearers, in order to enrich their minds with those sentiments which may serve to direct their willing feet into the way of God's commandments.

The knowledge of religion is to be drawn from the works, and especially from the word of God. What instruction may be drawn from the works of God, it is not perhaps so easy to say. Reason sometimes assumes the merit of discovering what is received by tradition. The original of certain opinions is so remote, that they cannot be easily traced up to their source, and are therefore supposed to be the natural dictates of the human understanding, or what it brings to light by the use of its own powers. Others, again, form a system in their own minds,
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by the united aid of natural and revealed religion; and then setting themselves to determine, what they owe to the one, and what to the other, they impute every thing which they can deduce, by probable arguments from first principles, to the teaching of nature; and refer to revelation those truths alone, which do not easily admit of this deduction. This appears to be the case with some of those writers who have favoured the world with discourses on natural and revealed religion; and with some too, who have assumed the pompous title of demonstration. They have sat down with all the opinions in their minds, of which they intended to give the detail; and, instead of marking out the progress of their ideas, and directing to the true sources of their knowledge, they have represented those truths, as branches of natural religion, which most probably owe their original to divine revelation; or, at least, they have given no certain criterion, by which to separate the one from the other.

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If we inquire into the state of opinions on moral and religious subjects, in those countries which have not enjoyed the light of revealed truth, we shall perceive that they stood in great need of farther instruction; and wanted more precise ideas of the rule of life, and more effectual motives to observe it, than their own reasonings afforded. Whether this was owing to the peculiar difficulty of the subject to persons in their situation, or to their not making a proper use of the lights which they had, I shall not take upon me to determine.

I am far, however, from denying the reality of natural religion. It is, on the contrary, essential to the very being of religion, that certain doctrines be established in our minds, previous to the study of divine revelation; and those who acknowledge no natural truths, if they are not the secret enemies of such as are revealed, cannot be allowed to be the wisest and most consistent defenders of them. Who, for instance, can with any propriety

propriety speak of a revelation from God, unless he have some previous knowledge of God? What notions can he have of a power to violate or control the laws of nature, and thereby to prove the extraordinary interposition of heaven, who does not acknowledge a regular orderly course, which falls under the direction of the Supreme Intelligence? Or how can he consider the testimony of God, as giving undoubted certainty to any scheme of opinions, who is not first convinced of the divine knowledge and veracity?

I will not scruple, therefore, to advise such as are training up for the office of preachers, to inquire into the truths of religion in the usual method; and to begin with taking a view of the principles of natural, and thence to proceed to those of revealed religion.*

* To those, who wish to improve their notions on this subject, one may recommend Priestley's Institutes of Natural Religion, the first part of his letters to a philosophical unbeliever, and above all, the first thirteen propositions in the second volume of Hartley on Man. J. H.

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§ II.

The works of God lie open to our inspection; and, by their grandeur and beauty, invite us to consider them. They contain such a variety of particulars, and so constantly present us with something new and surprising, that the most minute inquiries are only the more pleasing, the further they are pursued. No other study is so well adapted to elevate our minds, and to give us the most sublime conceptions. But its truest, best use, is to furnish to our view the most striking proofs of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator of all. This goodly frame should engage the attention of every man, as far as his leisure and abilities serve. Above all others he, whose business it is to impart religious instructions, should be careful to enrich his mind with the notions which such researches will give.

It is a small portion only of the works of nature, which falls under the notice of man.

man. There is not any part, of which he can have a full comprehension. But wherever he turns his eyes, he will see the plainest marks of a presiding intelligence, and of the most wise and benevolent purposes. Appearances of evil, it is true, as well as of good, will rise up before his sight, in the progress of his inquiries; but it will not be difficult for him to determine which is the character of the workmanship. Those things which, on the first view, appear to be marks of imperfection, and presumptions against a prevailing, good design, a more careful examination will discover to be real perfections, and instances of the good order, of which a general view of the whole will easily convince the candid inquirer. An acquaintance with the works of the ancients, will supply a long list of supposed faults in the constitution and government of the universe: but it is remarkable, that the more accurate inquiries, and the more enlarged knowledge of succeeding ages, have discovered the propriety of what had been before condemned;

demned; and found out very great advantages in the very things, which had been pitched upon as instances of a doubtful or evil design. This should teach us to be very cautious, how we censure Nature and Providence; and will afford a fair presumption, that all improvements in natural knowledge will strengthen the evidence for religion, and produce a growing conviction, that the general happiness is the design and end of the whole, and of every part.

The manner of studying this useful science will be different, as the situation and talents of those who are engaged in it differ. Some will pursue it with greater advantages; others with fewer. The man of genius, who has, besides, the opportunity of making the proper experiments, not content with what is already known, will pursue his inquiries into new subjects; and on those which have been already considered, will be studious to confirm such deductions as have been fairly made, to remove what is superfluous

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ous, and to prune away the errors: and he will employ his best abilities, to prepare the way for those who shall choose to tread the same path in the present, and succeeding ages. Well aware of the design and use of experiments, he will never neglect to make them, but pursue this track with unremitting industry and ardour; knowing that the system which wants this support is only conjectural, and may be prejudicial to real knowledge. He will not, however, be so timid, as to decline hazarding an hypothesis which is plausible; but will fairly propose it, and, after a just account of its strength and weakness, will leave it to his successors to establish, or take it away.

Others find themselves obliged to proceed in a different way. They have not the opportunity of making any new experiments, they want the skill to apply them to their proper use; or they may not have it in their power, so much as to repeat the experiments which have been already made. It remains for them

to peruse such records of facts, as they are able to procure; and after satisfying themselves of their authenticity, to draw the just conclusion.

A man, however, need not be a philosopher, nor even be much acquainted with the writings of the philosophers, to learn the true character of the works of creation, and of their Author. All that is requisite is to open his eyes on the scene which presents itself, to examine the most striking appearances, and the more obvious properties of the beings with which he is surrounded; and this, it is apprehended, will be sufficient to convince one, who can proceed no further, that what he beholds, is the work of a wise and good Being.*

It is easy to conclude, that in the study of nature every one will direct his more particular inquiries to the parts, in which

* Trémbley's Instructions d'un pere is a most pleasing work on the religious improvement of natural knowledge.
W. T.

he is most nearly interested. The husbandman, for instance, to the difference of soils, the various productions of each, and the animals to which they are most suitable: the artist, to the particular bodies on which his art is employed: the philosopher, to those objects which appear most conducive to his knowledge of the whole. Would it not be strange, if in this predilection which almost all make, that which is most interesting to every individual should be most generally neglected? Shall we say that the study of man, which it concerns every one to pursue, gains less attention than any other? The uses of this branch of knowledge are yet so many and so obvious, that they cannot easily escape the observation of the most careless inquirer. How many are the instances of design, which rise to view in the examination of the human body! The first and most obvious appearances clearly indicate a wise and benevolent intention in its formation; and the more accurate researches, which reveal the structure of its

internal parts, bring to light additional confirmations of the same pleasing truth, that it is the work of supreme intelligence and perfect goodness. But the fairest characters of the Being from whom it is derived, are to be found in the human mind: its powers of perceiving and judging, of compounding and separating its ideas, of comparing them with each other, and drawing conclusions from them, and of disposing the truths it has discovered into a just and orderly treatise, directly lead the thoughts of the observer to His wisdom, who is the fountain of these streams. In like manner, the affections which concern the individual, and conduce to his preservation and enjoyment; and the more amiable dispositions, which unite him to the species, and engage him to seek and rejoice in the common good, are the most unequivocal marks of the benevolence which is concerned in his production. Examine the moral powers of man, follow him into his social connections, and consider him as the member of a private

private family, or a larger community; observe the natural exercise and obvious tendency of domestic and civil government to co-operate with his moral nature, and to direct him to the affectionate approbation of virtue, and to the just censure of vice; and you will see the openings of a moral scheme, and the strongest presumptions of a righteous government, which distributes good and evil to all its subjects, in proportion to their several characters. The sketch of this just administration, begun in this present world, will encourage every considerate person to expect a future state of righteous retribution; and will prepare him to receive the discoveries, which divine revelation makes, on this subject, with greater confidence.

This is a small specimen of the use which may be made of the study of man, to confirm and illustrate the doctrines of religion. How disproportionate such an outline is, to the importance and extent of the subject, will be readily allowed. It may, however, be sufficient to show

how many, and what excellent, materials this science furnishes; and to awaken a more general attention to it. It cannot admit of a doubt, but that from this source the christian preacher may draw those waters, which will refresh and strengthen his hearers, and prepare them to accomplish the journey to which he directs them. Whatever, therefore, will enlarge and improve his ideas on this subject, such as his own careful and repeated observations, and the diligent perusal of those which have been made by others, particularly in the instructive pages of the wise historian, will invite his warm and eager pursuit.

My opinion of the use of civil history, will be easily collected from this hint. But I reckon the advantages with which it is attended so very great, that I cannot pass over the subject, without a more particular inquiry into them. It offers itself to our first view, under the most pleasing appearance, as a description of man, and a relation of his sentiments and actions.

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It would be strange indeed, if the history of the lion, the horse, and even of other inferior animals, should interest us, and we should be at much pains to trace out their nature and properties; and not have the same, or even a higher curiosity to improve our ideas of human nature, by similar inquiries. Every one almost is pleased with the portraits of man, which fiction presents; and the books which contain them are read with an avidity, which the greatest plenty is incapable of satiating, and the most glaring faults cannot entirely suppress. Yet what, after all, can we say in favour of the best of them, more than this, that they contain a pleasing representation of the theory which the writer has framed, concerning the dispositions and affections of the human mind? Let us suppose it to be a true one; so far then the work is innocent: but if, as is more probable, it be infected with prejudices and errors, it will have the demerit of exposing them in a way, which will procure them the easiest admission with those who read. History,
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which does not invent facts and situations, but represents them as they are found to be, is not liable to this objection: so far from this, it is calculated to convey very useful instructions on the most interesting of all subjects.

I am well aware, that it will be objected, that this representation of the use of history is ideal; and that there are few, if any, writings of this kind, to which it will apply. The chief events which they contain, are battles; and the preparations for them, their operations, and consequences, are the principal circumstances which they afford, to awaken and engage the attention of the reader. His humanity is continually shocked, by the relation of such vast numbers, of his own species drawn up in array against each other, furnished with every thing which the utmost ingenuity can invent, for their mutual destruction; and by the detail which presently follows, of the wounded and slain, with all the subsequent horrors of this unnatural practice.

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It is a mortifying reflection, that the history of the world should so generally be a representation of such unpleasing scenes; that the substance of all the relations which it contains, should be the crimes of men, and the evils with which they are attended. This, however, is sometimes as much the fault of the historian, as of his subject. He is so struck with the events which awaken the tender passions, that he allows them the principal place in his work; and employs all the eloquence which he possesses, to give an affecting description of them: whilst the more numerous facts, which afford a pleasing likeness of human nature, which show how the enjoyments of individuals are procured, how families subsist, and how larger societies are formed, are passed over in silence, or so slightly touched, as to make little or no impression on the reader's mind.*

* Perhaps modern history may not be so censurable in these respects, as ancient. At least Milot's Philological Elements both of ancient and modern history, afford good accounts of government, of the arts and sciences. J. H.

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There is a strange propensity in men, to dwell on the dark side of our common nature; and to entertain themselves and others with descriptions of the follies and vices of men, in those subjects, in which they appear peculiarly ridiculous or flagitious. They are fonder of satire, than panegyric; and the lives of Nero or Domitian are more inquired after, than those of Titus, Trajan, or Marcus Aurelius.

Whatever else the historian be, he is, however, for the most part, true to the cause of virtue, which, as often as he has occasion to describe, he holds up to the approbation of all; whilst the pictures which he gives of vice, are such as excite a general indignation. In this view, history merits the particular attention of those, who read to improve their moral and religious sentiments. "It is a remark," says Hume,* "worthy the attention of the speculative reader, that the

* *Moral and Political Essays*, vol. I. p. 75. Edin. 1742.

"historians

“historians have been almost without
 “exception the true friends of virtue,
 “and have always represented it in its
 “proper colours, however they may have
 “erred in their judgments of particular
 “persons.”

Nor is the danger so great, as may
 be apprehended, of taking up opinions
 unfavourable to mankind from this study;
 especially if we read histories of all kinds,
 and pay the attention, which it merits,
 to that part which contains the lives of
 wise and good men. To this we should
 add, a careful observation of the cha-
 racters of men, as they fall under our
 notice in the world; which will contri-
 bute to remove this prejudice.

This course of reading, and these
 observations, will bring to our view,

How far this character of historians in general, will
 apply to the historian of the Decline and Fall of the Roman
 Empire, may well be questioned by those, who have been dis-
 gusted with the strange propensity to indecency, which he
 discovers in his latter volumes. W. T.

indeed,

indeed, many instances of wickedness. We shall see the lawless passions of men breaking out into enormities, which will excite our keenest indignation. On these occasions, the severest reflections on men and their manners, fall from the pen of the satyrist; and the most tragical exclamations on the degeneracy of the present times, escape the rigid censurer of his contemporaries. Here the reviler of human nature triumphs in the confirmation of his favourite doctrine, that "all our nature is sin;" and with an air of exultation, calls upon you to observe the excesses, into which the unrestrained passions of men hurry them. Consider, however, if it be only for a moment, whence it is that we are so much shocked with the more heinous instances of vice which we behold: it is because they are not more common. Did they happen daily, every where, they would cease to awaken such bitter invectives: so that this rather speaks in favour of human nature, than against it. "How justly," says one, "might we exclaim against
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“the universal wickedness of mankind,
“were crimes as common as it is to see
“men contracting alliances and friend-
“ships, forming and preserving societies,
“practising justice and equity, giving
“and returning benefits, providing with
“honest industry for their families and
“friends, exercising commendable arts,
“and working towards a common good!”

So easy is it for a candid inquirer to examine the actions of men, without becoming uncharitable; and to collect such opinions from the inquiry, as will raise his ideas of human nature, and of the great Being, from whom it is derived.

But let the opinions we form of men in consequence of these researches be what they will; they will, however, be favourable to the notion of a similar order in the moral, to that in the natural world, and so strengthen the arguments for the divine providence and government. If they lead to honourable ideas of human nature, and teach us to regard the creature

ture man as eminently distinguished by his intellectual and moral powers; how obvious will be the conclusion, that the Being from whom he proceeds must be possessed, at least, of the excellencies which he has communicated! If, on the contrary, we rest in the opinion, that men are universally selfish; that they scruple no wickedness, by which they may accomplish their low purposes; that they are continually deceiving, supplanting, betraying each other; that the semblance of attachment amongst them is wholly false and means only their own interest; that the end of all their intercourse in society is, mutually to overreach, plunder, and destroy: let the features of the picture be heightend, till the shocking appellation, "half brute, half-devil," shall aptly apply to it; still, whilst it is confessed that such creatures do subsist in society, His surpassing skill must be acknowledged, which prevents the threatening ruin from entering and overwhelming this part of his creation.

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I was far from intending so particular a detail, when I entered on this part of the subject; but, if it afford the christian preacher any assistance in the religious study of nature, or only hint to him the many advantages with which it will be attended, so as to engage his early and renewed application, I shall think my labour well bestowed.

§ III.

It easily appears, from what has been said, that the inquiry into the doctrines of natural religion, will call up our attention to those which are revealed. Here the same accurate study of the word of God will be necessary, as in the former instance of his works. How desirable it is, that a person enter upon, and prosecute, these studies with a serious, but manly spirit; with a humble opinion of himself; and, at the same time, with a full determination to submit to no man's authority in matters of religion, it is unnecessary to say. We can-

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not be thought, indeed, to have due respect for the sacred cause of religious truth, unless we espouse it with this liberal, generous spirit. What a pitiful advocate for the truth will he be thought, who searches after, or professes it, with the dispiriting fear of offending, or with the sordid desire of pleasing, this or that man? He can have little prospect of acquiring the invaluable treasure, who can never lose sight for a moment of a certain set of opinions, to which he has already, or must presently, declare his assent. To indulge this spirit must, on all subjects, be prejudicial to the cause of truth; but it strikes the serious mind nowhere so forcibly as in the case of divine revelation.

We are chargeable with equal meanness, in admitting the interference of human authority on any points, on which God appears to have spoken either with his own voice in his works, or by that of men, whom he has commissioned to declare his will. But revealed truths have

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so much engaged the passions, and interests of men; and the powers of this world have thought themselves so much at liberty to give their sanction, to encourage or oppose certain opinions with regard to them; that the caution, not to fear the person of man, where the interests of truth were at stake, appeared peculiarly seasonable in this part of my discourse.

It will appear, from what has been said, that I mean not to shelter myself under the wings of any religious establishment. I am very sensible how large, and how formidable a body will be drawn up against me, on my chusing this ground; but he is unworthy of the honourable character of an advocate of religious truth, who fears any numbers, or any strength which may be enlisted against it.

But, to take a fair estimate of the strength of the opposite party: the arguments of those, who have drawn up a set of articles, which all the members of their respective communities, or their ministers

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alone, are obliged to subscribe, give me little concern. They must have confined themselves to very few particulars, or have drawn them up with uncommon attention, if it be not easy to show, that they have admitted doctrines not sufficiently certain and important; or excluded such as have an equal right to a place there with those which have been introduced; or have not expressed themselves with sufficient precision, or sufficient latitude, in the articles which they propose to the acceptance of their christian brethren. For should it appear, that the definitions are either too strict, or too lax; that the propositions are too few, or too many; the whole must fall to the ground, as insufficient for the purpose, for which it was intended.

It is more difficult to speak properly to those of a more philosophical turn, who, without offering any creed, assert, that the civil magistrate has a right to know the opinions of every member of the community,

community, and especially of such as profess to instruct others in religion; and that no sect has any just reason to expect his countenance or protection, without satisfying him, that its opinions may be safely tolerated. "The governor in every society," say they, "has a right to restrain those, who expose poisons to sale, under the name of wholesome medicines: and shall he suffer those doctrines to be propagated, which would infect the minds of his subjects, and render them averse or indifferent to the offices of social life?" — It is our duty then, it should seem, to pursue our philosophical and religious inquiries with spirit and diligence, with a hearty love to the truth, and a high veneration for the God of truth: but withal to take care how we receive any notions, which the magistrate is not inclined, or which good policy will not allow him, to tolerate. — With what spirit, and with what success, we shall search after the truth on this plan, it is not difficult to divine.

There are some persons, however, who seem to think themselves very liberal in the concession, when they say, that they have no objection to the most unrestrained inquiries, and to all that liberty of opinion, which follows from them; but they think there should not be the same license of profession, especially where the safety of the community, or the particular system which it countenances, is in question.

Who does not see, of how extraordinary a nature the favour is, which is here granted? We have the indulgence to think for ourselves, which no human power can restrain; but we must not declare our opinions. But what if they be of such a nature, that we cannot keep them to ourselves, without incurring the guilt of dissimulation? Or suppose it to be our deliberate judgment, that it is our duty to declare them?

The question will still return, Is it right to oppose those doctrines, in which
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the society in general are agreed, and which they acknowledge to be sacred? This cannot be made a question, by those who acknowledge the difference between truth and error, and allowing the fallibility of the human judgment, are persuaded, that truth ought in every case to prevail over error; which it will hardly do, if every proposition whatever be not submitted to a free and impartial examination.

It will still be said, that some opinions are favourable, others are prejudicial to society, and that for the same reason that the former are encouraged, the other should be prohibited. This, I acknowledge, is the most formidable objection to an universal toleration, and deserves the most attentive consideration.* It should be remembered, however, that the parti-

* How would the author have rejoiced, if he had lived to see the days, when the words universal liberty were used instead of universal toleration! Toleration, it has been well said, only suggests the idea of pity. It is not the opposite of intolerance, but only the counterfeit of it. J. H.

culars, to which it will fairly apply, are not very numerous. For though there is not perhaps any moral or religious truth, which is not important, when considered in its connection with others; or any error which will not, if pursued through all its consequences, be of evil tendency; yet there are many opinions which, taken by themselves, have little or no influence on the actions of those who receive them. As far, therefore, as society is concerned, they must be regarded as in a great measure indifferent: and the greatest part of the disputes which have in all ages engaged the attention of mankind, have turned on subjects of this sort.

Those truths which have a direct and immediate influence on the actions of men, besides that they are few, are surrounded with such a light, as to strike every eye that beholds them; and the opposite errors are no sooner seen, than they are discovered to be such. There is little occasion for any argumentative discussion in this business. The evidence

for

for these doctrines is so strong in itself, that scarcely any thing can increase it; and there is little danger of their receiving any injury from the arts which may be employed against them. In the house of their friends, indeed, they may be hurt, and no where else. There is at least some danger in the officious care which they take to shield them from every attack, lest their anxiety should create a suspicion, that these truths have not all the certainty which is attributed to them. The very attempt to secure the reception of them by worldly advantages, or to shelter them from inquiry by pains, penalties, or any worldly inconveniences whatever to those who call them in question, can have no other good effect, than to weaken the foundation on which they are established.

If, after all, there should be persons who carry their doubts so far, as to question all moral obligations, how are we to proceed with them? in what religious or civil employment are they fit to be trusted?

To

To this it is obvious to reply, that persons may have their doubts in their closets, and pursue their speculations so far as to undetermine all principles whatever, who, when they come into the world, speak and act like other people. But should it indeed be their settled opinion, that truth and justice, with the other virtues, had no claim to our approbation; and that it was a matter of indifference, whether they made these or their opposites the rule of their conduct; where could be the advantage of tests and articles to those, who could have no scruple of submitting to any which would answer their purpose?

If this reasoning be admitted, it will follow, that we should pursue our inquiries into the doctrines of scripture, as well as on every other religious subject, with an entire freedom; acknowledging no power in any man, in any body of men to prescribe what we are to believe, or what we are to reject. With a full persuasion of the reasonableness of this free inquiry, I recommend it to the Christian
preacher,

preacher, ever to conduct his studies with this spirit.*

§ IV.

It will not however, be allowed, that this determination to judge for himself, will render a man rash and precipitate in his judgments; or prevent his making a proper use of the observations and inquiries of those, who have formerly walked in the same paths. His opinions may be the result of an impartial examination, without his being in the least chargeable with a conceited opinion of his own understanding. He may be very sensible of the many causes of error, of the necessity

* See Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone, Fowndes on Toleration, Priestley's and Cornilh's Addresses to Protestant Dissenters, and particularly Rabaud Etienne's Speech in favour of religious freedom to be found in the Extracts from books, No 1, p. 15—18 printed at Birmingham, 1790, and in greater perfection in the Appendix to Christie's first volume on the New Constitution of France.

Perhaps the best defence of establishments is in Paley's Moral Philosophy: J. H.

of

of suspense and a cautious assent, and of the care with which every argument should be weighed; and resolve, after all, to follow the dictates of his own mind. He may be very willing to take all the assistance, which the conversation and writings of others can afford him, without resigning himself to their direction and blindly following their guidance.

But whatever regard he may pay to his own decisions, every wise man will, in matters of revelation, be determined by the unerring rule of faith, the divine word. To ascertain this, he will have recourse to the predictions which are contained, and the miracles which are related in the Holy Scriptures; and as far as both, or either, appear to be credible, will acknowledge them sufficient to establish the interposition of Heaven. It is remarkable, that the argument from prophecy, and that from miracles, have been employed to invalidate each other, according as the one or the other has been the favourite study of a particular author; but the consistent friend of revealed religion will be
attentive

attentive to both, and make his best advantage of the helps, which they jointly afford, to establish the authority of the sacred books. What these are, and with what regard they should be received, will be his next inquiry. And whatever difficulty there may be in determining the canonical books of the Old and New Testament, and their sufficiency to establish a particular system of truths; it must be acknowledged, that there is in each revelation one leading, important truth, which appears every where, and which all the parts concur to establish. The chief point in the Jewish religion is the existence of the one great Being, who made and governs the world; and in the Christian, a future state of righteous retribution. The books which contain these truths, will doubtless command the attention of all wise men into whose hands they fall, and they will be desirous of making themselves masters of all the knowledge which they contain. But to learn their leading design is no small acquisition; and the firm belief of these

two doctrines, must have a mighty influence to add to the strength and excellence of the human mind.

The religious inquiries, which are conducted on this plan, will be particularly agreeable, and useful. The truth of God, whether contained in the book of nature, or in the volume of his word, never appears so pleasing, as when viewed in the light in which it is placed, as profitable for instruction in righteousness. This is likewise a most eligible way of considering it, as it will contribute to take off the attention from the less useful parts and confine the eye to the interesting doctrines, which are the strength and joy of those who receive them. I would in particular recommend this method of studying religion, and of deducing its truths, to the christian preacher, in order to his applying them, first to the improvement of his own heart, and then to the benefit of those who hear. Thus will he fulfil the end of his ministry, according to the

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noble description of its design, "to save himself," and "those who hear him."

It is impossible that, in the course of a regular education for the christian ministry, this branch of study can be omitted. In many schools of learning, it justly makes a principal part of it. To enter on the office without this previous preparation, is as absurd as it would be for a man to commence a judge or advocate, without any knowledge of the laws, on which his determinations or reasonings are founded; or to become a professor of any other art or science, without having any knowledge of its principles. But it is not enough, that the preacher examine this subject previous to his entrance on the office. It is a study, to which he should return from time to time; and which he should pursue, without suffering any long interruption, to the end of his life. Besides the use of this knowledge to the preacher, to improve his ideas of religion, and to enable him to enrich his public discourses with those illustrations,

illustrations of them which it affords; I will venture to promise him, that he will always return to it with fresh pleasure. For as, in the course of his public services, he will be more likely to consider the doctrine of revelation in its practical design and tendency, he will have an ever-growing conviction of the utility of the scheme, and an increasing pleasure in every review of it. In this view, the word of God, like his works, will continually furnish fresh matter for inquiry, and contribute "to make the man of God perfect." To this inquiry, and the uses to which it is applied, our Saviour may probably refer, when he says, that "every scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like a householder who bringeth out of his treasure things new and old."*

* Perhaps few books give a clearer or more general view of the scheme of Providence, or of the leading design of the Old and New Testament, than Law's *Considerations on the Theory of Religion*. J. H.

§ V. This

§ V.

This general view of the nature and design of revealed religion, will be of admirable use to the christian preacher. He will not, however, rest here; but will be studious to inform himself of the contents of all the books, which sound criticism shall determine to make a part of the original revelation. The writings, which will offer themselves to this scrutiny, are of different kinds; and will gain such a reception, as the particulars, which are contained in them, shall appear to merit. Some of them are merely historical, and have the appearance of being collections from certain traditions, records, or annals of facts, which were generally received for true and authentic, in the places where they were preserved. This seems to be the character of most of the historical books of the Old Testament. These histories, in common with all others, present us with objects of approbation and censure, in the characters which are

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delineated. Some are drawn, which are highly excellent; others exceedingly faulty; and all of a mixed nature: so that the best of them, if there are many particulars in them to command our admiration and esteem, are not free from those defects, which call for the candid indulgence of the reader. Great pains have been taken, by a certain class of writers, to blacken these characters, especially such as the historians have held forth as the objects of admiration; and on this account, the friends of revelation have shown a determination to vindicate them altogether, and to represent them as almost faultless.* But however they may be worthy of blame, who detract from the real merit of good men, or even so much as withhold the praise, to which their virtue entitles them; it cannot surely be necessary to throw a varnish over the faults, or wholly to conceal the imperfections, to which all human characters are

* See the History of the Man after God's own Heart, and Chandler's Life of David. W. T.

liable. The praises bestowed on Abraham, as the friend of God, or on David, as the man after God's own heart, by the writers of their lives, are not, perhaps, rightly understood by us. The expressions of perfect, upright, and the like, which are applied to others, are justly interpreted as descriptions of their general character, and not as referring to every action and incident of their lives. It may be allowed, too, without injury to the cause of religion, that, in some instances, the historians were possibly too lavish in their praises; that they had an over-fond attachment to the names of their countrymen, and especially of their illustrious ancestors; and from a veneration for their memory, as the friends and advocates of religious truth, were not willing to allow any thing faulty or exceptionable in their characters. But whatever the sentiments of others be, it is our part to give its deserved praise to every good action, and with the strictest impartiality to mark every thing of a contrary nature. The preacher, in parti-

cular, when he refers to these histories in his public discourses, will be careful to hold forth to the esteem and admiration of his hearers, those qualities alone which are truly excellent; and to direct their censure to every thing which they ought to avoid.

This use, the history which I am considering has, in common, with almost every other; but it has an excellency, which is perhaps peculiar to itself. The pen of the common historian is usually employed to give us high notions of men, to display the abilities of princes, the wisdom of legislators, and the magnanimity and courage of heroes; but the history before us has a far different object. It represents governors and warriors as raised up by the providence of God, to accomplish his purposes, and to bless or to punish mankind agreeably to his will, and under his direction and influence. Thus it coincides with what has just been mentioned as the leading design of the

the Jewish revelation, to establish the divine existence and government.

After the historical, the prophetic books of the Old Testament will naturally call up the reader's attention. The faithful historian relates what has happened; the true prophet foretels what shall come to pass in some future period of time; and both of them agree, in taking such a portion of the course and order of events, as shall be agreeable to their particular purpose. To qualify a person for the writing of history, all that is necessary is, that he have an accurate knowledge of his subject, and that he have the skill to dispose his materials, so as to convey a full and clear idea of it. If, with these qualifications, it be his design to give a true relation of facts, nothing essential to the character seems to be wanting. But, in order to give an account of what is concealed in the womb of time, if it rest on any higher authority than mere conjecture, there are other endowments necessary, and

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those such as the unassisted powers of the human mind cannot supply.

Various are the claims which have been made to the knowledge of futurity, in the different ages of the world. Some of them carry their own confutation in the very face of them; others, though not so evidently false, are attended with suspicious circumstances; and there are predictions, which have so many of the appearances of truth, as to merit the attention and inquiry of the sober critic.

Such future events as depend on the volitions of men, cannot be foreknown without a perfect knowledge of the opinions and dispositions of the beings concerned in the production of them. Now there is no sense or faculty, by which one man can gain any immediate knowledge of the heart of another, and all the signs which lead to the discovery of what passes in it, are too uncertain to be depended upon. For whether he endeavour to collect the sentiments of any one from his countenance,

countenance, his words, or his actions—and I know of nothing else which will afford him the least light in the inquiry,—it is obvious, he may be deceived by any of them, or by all together. If, therefore, we meet with a relation of what is to happen in any future time, consisting of such particulars as imply something more than a bare conjecture, and either see ourselves, or have a credible account from others; of the facts by which it is verified, we are certain, that the relater must have derived his knowledge of them from a Being, who can discover the actions of men in their causes, and has an exact knowledge of the inward principles of the human mind, and of their operations and consequences.

What will happen in the material world, may be foreseen by one who is acquainted with the laws of matter and motion; and no prediction, in subjects of this nature, will give any presumption of supernatural knowledge, except such alone as relate a foreseen violation of the regular

course of events, which it is supposed, will continue, till it please the Author of it to interpose, in an extraordinary manner, for its alteration. But he who foretells the voluntary actions of men, or any events which are connected with, or dependent upon them, must have other means of information than his own inquiries, or any human assistance, can afford him.

That the scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain such predictions, is by christians, generally allowed. Of these, some received their accomplishment presently after they were delivered; their use was consequently confined to one particular time: others were not fulfilled till many years and ages had elapsed; and therefore all who can be persuaded, that the prophecy really answers to the event, and has the antiquity to which it pretends, must be convinced of the extraordinary interposition of Heaven: others reach to our own times, and we perceive the growing evidence which they give to the

the truth of divine revelation : and there are, besides these, such as appear to relate to periods of time which are still future ; with which we have little concern, but to observe the facts which rise up to verify them, and to transmit them, with all the purity we are able, to the succeeding generation.

I am well aware, to what laborious and difficult investigations this inquiry will lead. The language of prophecy is usually obscure : it requires much knowledge and attention to apply it, in every instance, to the facts to which it relates. Let those, who wish to discredit predictions altogether, make their own use of these concessions : the truth ought not to be denied or concealed, and no cause is worth supporting, which needs the aid of dissimulation. An author is not always thrown aside, because he is obscure ; or a subject of inquiry neglected, on account of the knowledge and learning which are necessary, to become masters of it. The only questions proper to be asked, are, Is there

there any such difficulty in the matter, as to make it impossible to be understood? And will the advantages of the acquisition, compensate for the labour which it requires? If it be allowed, with regard to any branch of science, that it is a worthy object of study, and that we have faculties to master the difficulties which attend it; all that remains is, that we apply to it with all the ardour and attention, which our situation will admit.

To apply this to the case before us; whether the language of the ancient prophets be intelligible or not, and how far the knowledge necessary to discern the accomplishment of them is attainable, can be determined by those alone, who have made a faithful and diligent inquiry. Some of them appear to be attended with fewer, others with more difficulties; the accomplishment of some is so evident, as to force conviction on the mind of almost every inquirer; and with others it may remain a doubt, after all the labour bestowed upon them, whether or no the events,

events, to which they refer, are or can be produced.

As to the uses of the subject, they are such as amply reward the application of the serious student. To the preacher, in particular, it will be highly useful, not only as it confirms the truth of revelation, but as it affords the noblest views of the divine knowledge and government, showing that all the events of time are comprehended in one understanding, and directed by one will, so as to accomplish the same great purpose.

Thus much will easily offer itself to the view of every one, who applies to this study: and it may with truth be added, for the encouragement of those who wish to prosecute the inquiry, that most of the writers who have studied scripture prophecies, with the view of pointing out such as have received their accomplishment, have been successful. Those, indeed, who have taken upon them to fix the period of such as are still future, and

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to foretel from them when the events, to which they refer, shall take place, have only exposed their own ignorance and presumption; but, in the humbler province of interpreters, they have generally thrown light on those who have gone before them, and held it up to their successors. It may be fairly presumed, therefore, that every age will make some advances on the preceding in this as in other branches of useful knowledge, till the discoveries, which God has made, shall all be understood in the future, eternal world, to which they evidently direct our attention. In this view, every prediction, which has received, or shall receive, a clear accomplishment, strengthens our faith in him, who is the author of eternal salvation to all his faithful servants.*

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* Newton on the Prophecies, Hartley, vol. II. prop. 30—34.

It is worthy of our attention, that the most particular description of the future happiness of the righteous is contained in the book of the Revelation of John. Had it been given in one of the historical books, or in any other part
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The other parts of the Old Testament, being either devotional or moral, will command the attention of the reader, in proportion to his relish for either of these kinds of composition. But the preacher will study them, as other works on such subjects, to improve his own stock of ideas, and so to enable him to enrich his discourses with quotations from them, or allusions to them, or to represent, in his own words, the observations and directions which they contain.

of scripture, it would doubtless have had its use; but it can appear no where with so much propriety, or be attended with such advantage, as in its connection with a series of prophecies, which are generally understood to have received a gradual accomplishment from the time when they were written, to the present day. For, as Lowman justly observes, (*Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of John*, p. 257.)

“An observation of the faithful and punctual accomplishment
“of the former parts of this prophecy, in times past, for
“several hundreds of years, serves much to confirm our
“faith and hope, in as punctual and faithful performance of
“what remains.”

§ VI. The

§ VI.

The books of the New Testament will be allowed to contain facts still more interesting, than those which have been considered. We have here the history of Jesus Christ, and of the first publication of his religion; a history extremely curious in itself, and especially in its consequences. Whoever considers the change of opinions and customs, which the christian religion effected, wherever it took place, must regard its establishment amongst any people, as the most extraordinary event in their history. But, if we further reflect, how obscure the country was in which it first appeared; who the missionaries were, by whom it was carried into other parts of the world; and what was the success which crowned their mission; we shall readily acknowledge, that the annals of the world do not afford a greater and more astonishing revolution. The opinions of a few fishermen, who are without any of the advantages of learning, wealth

wealth or power, to recommend them, who are despised and persecuted at home, and unknown abroad, are delivered first of all to their own countrymen, and then to their neighbours; and obtain a signal triumph, first over the prejudices of the common people, and afterwards over all the attempts which the greatest and most learned men in the world could form against them, and that without any address to the prevailing inclinations or passions of mankind. Trace these opinions in their progress from Palestine into the neighbouring parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and, in process of time, into the remotest districts of the Roman empire; view them in their passage across the vast Atlantic to the New World: cast your eyes east, west, north and south, and compute, as well as you are able, the extent of country, over which they have spread; and measure in your mind the period of eighteen centuries, which they have now nearly reached; and you will own, that such a vast increase from so small a beginning, should awaken the curiosity

riosity, and engage the attentive observation and inquiry of all the learned.

The general idea of the gospel-history is, briefly, this; that Jesus Christ, after a public ministry of a very short duration in the land of Judea—it is not certain that it continued two years, it is very generally allowed that it did not reach to the end of the fourth year*—was apprehended, tried as a criminal, and put to death; that early on the third day, he arose from the dead, conversed with his disciples for forty days, and then ascended

* Some, as Mann and Priestley, have thought that the ministry of Jesus lasted only one year. Only the gospel of John mentions more than one passover, and this only five feasts, which, if the first and last were the passover, would all occur in the space of one year. It is also imagined, that the fifth and sixth chapters of John should be transposed, and that the fourth verse in the sixth, or the word passover in it, has been inserted by mistake. See Priestley's *Observations on the Harmony of the Evangelists*, p. 38—63; or *Theo. Rep.* vol. II. p. 41—59. J. H.

Compare Bishop Newcome and Dr. Priestley, on the duration of Christ's ministry, which contains, perhaps, whatever can be said on either side. W. T.

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into heaven in their sight, and thus concluded his abode on earth.

The apostles of Christ were appointed to be the witnesses of this great fact, the resurrection of their Master, and to encourage all his followers in the expectation of rising from the dead, in order to share his glory and happiness. The resurrection of our Saviour establishes his authority as a divine teacher or messenger; and, in particular, gives a perfect credibility to every thing which he has taught respecting the present privileges, and especially the future happiness of all the righteous.

The rest of the history relates to the ministry of the apostles, first in the Jewish, and afterwards in the Heathen world; and is the opening of the vast design for the propagation of the gospel, which has just been considered.

The miracles and prophecies of the New Testament, do not require any par-

ticular consideration in this discourse, after what has been already said on those of the Old.*

The remaining books are the epistles, which were addressed by the apostles, either to particular persons or churches; or which, from their not having any such designation, were called catholic or universal.

The primary intention of these letters doubtless was, to direct and encourage the persons to whom they were sent, or to assist the christian world in general, in the particular age, in which the writers of them lived. But they are considered as containing also authoritative decisions on

* See Priestley's Institutes of Revealed Religion, the second part of his Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, and particularly Hartley on the Truth of the Christian Religion. Nor should any professor of the gospel, or any candid inquirer, who has leisure and ability, be unacquainted with Lardner's Credibility, and Jewish and Heathen Testimonies, with the Supplement to the Credibility, nor with Michaelis' Introductory Lectures to the New Testament. J. H.

many

many points, which concern all persons and ages. How far this representation is agreeable to the contents and design of these writings, it doubtless behoves us very seriously to consider.

That the apostles of Christ were unexceptional witnesses to such facts as fell under their own observation, cannot be questioned, without shaking the credit of all ancient history; that they actually understood the facts which they were appointed to attest, and knew how to draw just conclusions from them, may without difficulty be allowed; and that they deserve very high regard, in every thing which they have delivered with respect to the general doctrine of Christ, the constitution of christian churches, and the like. But that every thing which they said at all times, in all places, and on all occasions, was dictated by the holy spirit of God; and that the subjects themselves, and the words by which they were expressed, were in an extraordinary manner suggested to their minds, as some appear to have

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thought,

thought, cannot easily be believed. Such compositions would be a treasure too valuable to be trusted in the hands of weak mortals. Or if the mercy of God, which knows no bounds, should incline him to favour mankind with so matchless a work, we can never suppose he would suffer it to be transmitted from one to another, in the same way with other books. Who can believe that it would be left in such a state, as to admit of corruption or alteration, which we know to have taken place, in a greater or less degree, in every transcript which has been made of it? This has been the case, where the sacred books have been only transcribed in the language in which they were written; and every one sees, that they are more liable to such injuries, when they are translated into other languages. It is well known, that christians have in every age disputed with each other, whether or no certain books, or such and such particular parts of them, should be admitted into the sacred canon: now there is scarcely any one who will not be shocked with
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the thought that a book should be written, as it were, with the finger of God himself, and have no such marks of its high original, as to distinguish it from the work of a fallible, short-sighted mortal.

Many other arguments might be urged against such high notions of inspiration; but it is less necessary to enlarge here, as most in the present day, who write on this subject, content themselves with asserting a lower degree of it. It seems to be the general opinion, that the minds of the apostles were in an extraordinary degree enlightened with the knowledge of divine truth; but that they delivered it to others in their own words, as their abilities severally directed them, and as their acquaintance with the language, which they chose, admitted. But to this they add, that they were under such an extraordinary superintendance, as to preserve them from error on whatever subjects they declared their opinions, and to make their discourses and writings the infallible guides of all succeeding ages.

I am very sensible of the offence which it will give to many christians, to have this opinion called in question. But the concern of every man, and especially of the sacred preacher, the friend and advocate of divine knowledge should be, what is the truth, indifferent whom it will please, and whom it will offend. Now it must be confessed, that the character under which the apostles, and others employed in communicating the christian doctrine, appeared in the earliest ages, is different from what has been just mentioned. They appear to have considered themselves, and to have been considered by their disciples, not as decisive judges in the church of Christ, but as wise, diligent, and faithful interpreters of his will, as far as it had been delivered to them. How else shall we account for the accusation brought against Peter, because he had visited Cornelius, and preached the doctrines of the christian religion to him and his friends, and for the defence which he made; or for the conduct which Paul and his companions observed, with regard to

to the converts from amongst the gentiles, and the journey which he and Silas took, in order to stop the mouths of their accusers by the determination of the brethren at Jerusalem; or for the differences in opinion and practice, which subsisted among the apostles themselves? There are many other facts in the history of the New Testament, and passages in the epistles, which speak the same language; but I leave them to the observation of the diligent, attentive reader.

The leading idea of the office of the first preachers of the christian religion, which they give themselves, is, that they were witnesses of the life and character of Jesus. They were appointed, as has been said already, to give their faithful testimony to what they had either seen or heard. Their histories of the ministry of Christ, though they have a general consistence, yet differ from one another in circumstances of smaller importance. The great leading facts have the support of their united voice; but it is scarcely possible

to name an incidental one, which they have all of them related.

These facts, with the easy, obvious conclusions which they drew from them, were the chief subjects of the discourses, which the apostles of Christ delivered to the world. The truth of the facts, to which they gave their testimony, cannot with any appearance of reason be called in question; nor is there any room to suspect the justness of the inferences which they drew from them. The general doctrines which their genuine works contain, may be depended upon as true, and have been ever considered as such by the friends of the christian religion: nor is there any room to charge them with error on those points, which it was the business of their mission to establish: but books have been delivered under the names of the apostles, which certainly were not theirs; and those which they really wrote have undergone such changes, that it is sometimes difficult to determine what the true reading is. These writings are subject to the same

same variations with all other books, the copies of which are equally multiplied; but besides these involuntary corruptions, the sacred text has suffered by the insertion of some passages which did not belong to it, by the omission of others which did, and by alterations in what remained, in order to serve the purposes of those, who hoped by such arts to procure the establishment of certain customs, or the reception of doctrines to which they had a fond attachment. There is not a single copy of the scriptures, I am persuaded, which does not contain the leading doctrines of the christian religion, so as to be sufficient for the instruction of those who will give them an attentive perusal: the general credit of revelation, therefore, is not affected by these variations in the transcripts of the books by which it is transmitted; but to such an inspiration as is supposed to extend to every line and word in the sacred volume, it is an unanswerable objection.*

§ VII. The

* On this subject see Le Clerc's Five Letters, (compare Lowth's Vindication,) Bishop Law's Considerations, note, p. 265,

§ VII.

The great design of these books, which were first collected for the use of christian churches, and are still continued in them, seems to be this; to hold forth certain lights, which will enable those who will fix their eyes upon them, to form such a scheme of opinions and rules, as will be sufficient to direct their faith and practice.

If we read some accounts of these books, we shall be inclined to expect in them a complete and systematical delineation of all the doctrines and duties of religion, drawn out in a regular manner,

p. 265, edit. sixth, Wakefield on Inspiration, and the Theological Repository, particularly the Essays signed Pamphilus in the fourth volume. W. T.

The candid and attentive reader will find in the second volume of Hartley on Man, an admirable account and defence, in a very short compass, of the three different schemes of inspiration, prop. 19. It closes with the excellent observation, that all are brethren, and that they ought not to fall out by the way. J. H.

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with all the order, dependence, and mutual connection, which the most exact treatise could give them. If we look into the systems of divinity which are professedly founded upon them, and observe the metaphysical subtilties with which they abound; the nice questions which they propose and resolve; how exactly they explain the nature and properties of every being; and how familiarly they speak concerning the essence and substance of the first great cause, with all their curious detail of subsistencies, persons, and the like; we shall imagine the Bible to be the most abstruse, mysterious book that ever was written.* How greatly they will be disappointed, who take it into their hands with such expectations, must be obvious to every one, who has the smallest acquaintance with its contents.

I would, however, recommend this sacred volume to the diligent, attentive,

* See Priestley's History of Early Opinions, and General History of the Christian Church. W. T.

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and repeated perusal of those, who wish to have just opinions on the subject of religion, and to gain the best rules for the direction of their moral and religious conduct. But its true use appears to have been mistaken. For, however particular passages may be cited from it, to determine the controversies which have harassed the christian world, it may be presumed, that it is not calculated for this purpose, from the different and opposite determinations, which have been made under its sanction, on almost every debate, into which the contentious sons of men have entered. It is nearly impossible to enumerate all the controversies, which the busy curiosity of learned and unlearned men have introduced. But whether they have turned on the decrees and foreknowledge of God, and their influence on the actions of men; on the nature of the human soul, and the distinction between it and the body; on its separate existence, before it enters, and after it leaves the body; on the rank of beings in which Jesus Christ is to be placed,

placed, his pre-existence, the ends of his death, and its influence on the acceptance and future happiness of the true penitent; on the nature, personality and offices of the holy spirit of God; or on whatever other subject of a like nature; the contending disputants have almost constantly urged the authority of the sacred writers, in support of their opposite opinions, usually with equal advantage on both sides, or, to speak a plain truth, with little or none on either.

Hence some have been inclined to say, that any opinions whatever may be drawn from the sacred scripture, and, by the arts of ingenious men, supported under its authority. Those who have wished to show the insufficiency of the written word, without the aid of oral tradition, and of an infallible head to fix its meaning, have contemptuously called it a nose of wax, which might be drawn into the service of any cause: others, on what rational principles, or with what views, it is not so easy to say, have spoken in the
most

most degrading terms of the scripture revelation, without the teaching of the spirit to every individual, to lead him to the true interpretation of it.

These concessions have been greedily seized by the enemies of all revelation, who with great appearance of reason have concluded from them, that a written discovery of the will of God, is, not merely insufficient, but altogether useless. Thus do the leaders of the most opposite sects, in their zeal for their respective peculiarities, come nearer to each other, than they themselves could have imagined to be possible; and contend for their own distinguishing notions with an attachment, which undermines the foundation of all instituted religion.

But with regard to these opinions, and the proceedings of the controversialists, which have so evidently served to introduce and support them; they have in a great measure arisen from their mistaking, or neglecting, the true use of the scriptures,

tures. The original writers seldom mention the disputed doctrines which have been so much agitated in almost every succeeding age : on many of them they observe the most profound silence, and it would be easy to show that such passages of their works as have been urged for or against them, refer to a quite different matter ; and where they do speak on any of the higher subjects of religion, it is with that dignity of sentiment, and simplicity of expression, which, if imitated, would have prevented all controversy about them.

These writings have a real and most important use in the decision of religious controversies, as they have been called, though it has not always been sufficiently attended to ; and that is, by showing the utter insignificance of the far greater part of them. What good end they have answered, it is extremely difficult to say ; if they have sharpened the wits of men, they have diverted their attention from more important studies, with this singular

lar infelicity in the case of disputes in religion, that those who have engaged in them, have thought themselves the advocates of sacred truth, at the same time that they were drawing off their own regard, and that of those who would listen to them, from its main end and purpose. A still greater evil in writings of this sort, is the unfriendly, yea the angry, violent passions, which they have awakened in the authors of them, and, in some degree, in those also who have followed their several opinions.*

It

* The intelligent reader will perceive, that much more might have been said on this subject; and that the indignation excited by religious bigotry, and its numberless attendant evils, is purposely restrained: but the author of this discourse cannot allow himself to pass even this censure on the temper with which controversies have been conducted, and the malignant passions which they have occasioned, without mentioning the friendly debate, in a series of letters between Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley, occasioned by the *Disquisitions* of the latter on *Matter and Spirit*, as a most pleasing example of a contrary spirit. It does not fall within the design of this work, to point out the strength or weakness of the reasonings of either of these able writers; and a bare unsupported opinion of the supposed truth of either scheme, could not be of the least significance. But the

It is impossible, indeed, to be always out of the hearing of these controversies. They are often referred to by our best practical writers, and it is generally expected, that the christian preacher should know something of their respective merits; but to make them the subject of his whole study, appears to be a sad mispending of his precious hours. Besides, that it will draw off his attention from more important inquiries; it will be apt to give him a fondness for controversy, and to nourish those passions, which will prove unfavourable to his own tranquillity, and to the peace and happiness of society. But however the study of religion may lead the christian preacher

the freedom with which they have each of them pursued the opinion of the other into all its consequences, the candour with which this freedom has been received, and the mutual expressions of friendship and esteem which run through, and close the correspondence, merit the praises of all, and the imitation of such as shall choose to enter into such discussions; and mark it for one of the very few productions of the kind, which discover great zeal for particular opinions; and the highest candour for another who is equally zealous against them.

to these discussions, or whatever skill he may acquire in the decision of them, he should be very cautious how he introduces them into his pulpit-discourses, or suffers them to usurp the place of the moral precepts, which, with the noble and animating motives to the practice of them, which the general doctrines of religion supply, merit the particular attention of himself and his hearers.

Could the great Author of our religion be consulted in person on this subject, we should have an unerring rule, by which to proceed. We should have a sure criterion by which to judge what doctrines merit our attention, what are too high for the human faculties in its present state; and should be authorised, it may be, in passing over many of them as uninteresting and frivolous. With the help of such an instructor, we should have a clear discernment of the truth on every question of real importance; and should know precisely where we were to suspend our inquiries, and to sit down contented

contented with a modest and unpretending ignorance.

But as this is a felicity, which we are not to expect in this world, it will be our wisdom to substitute in its place the best expedient which our present condition affords, I mean the careful perusal of the discourses of Jesus, which, through the singular blessing of God, are handed down for our study and imitation. Here we find perpetual allusions to the great doctrines of religion, and such as show that the speaker had himself the noblest ideas on these subjects.

His doctrines are to be sought in his own discourses, and there only; nor should we hastily admit any thing as a part of his religious institution, which is not delivered by some one of the evangelists. Were every other part of the New Testament lost, except those books which give us the life and discourses of our Saviour, his system of religion would still be complete, and there would be the

same foundation, as there now is, for the faith and hope of his followers. Subsequent facts may be very instructive, and strengthen the evidence of a divine interposition; and the writings of the earlier christians more especially afford a very good help for understanding the doctrine of Christ; but his own discourses alone, it should seem, hold forth an authentic declaration of it. I would not be thought to undervalue the writings of the apostles of Christ; on the contrary, I esteem them very highly, and wish to improve my ideas on religious subjects by the repeated perusal of them; but in point of authority, they should not be put upon a level with the dictates of their Master. His religion came entire and perfect from his own mouth; and this with an authority superior to that of all other religious instructors.

He does not indeed enter into a particular detail, or minute explication of the doctrines of religion. This, it should seem, was not so agreeable to the character

ter of a preacher of righteousness, in which he appears to stand with a singular and unparalleled dignity. But I will venture to say, that whoever will diligently study his doctrine, and particularly his parables, will easily derive from them those lights, which will conduct him, with pleasure and satisfaction, through every useful inquiry into the theory of religion, which he shall be inclined to make. Were I disposed to enlarge, it would not be difficult to point out such accounts of the righteousness, goodness, mercy, and other perfections of God, either expressly given, or evidently referred to, as would lay a just foundation for every pious sentiment; but I leave it to those who are disposed to this work, to collect for their own use, all the passages of this kind, and to pursue the hints which are given; and I am well persuaded, they will not repent the labour. If, indeed, they expect any thing further from this sacred word; and especially if they seek a clue to guide them through the mazes, in which the busy curiosity of men has in-

volved the subject, and a determinate answer to the numberless questions, with which every side has been puzzled in its turn; they will find, that they have mistaken its purpose. Every thing useful in religion, may be learned with peculiar advantage from this best of teachers; but matters of mere curiosity, and especially of doubtful disputation, have no place in his institution.

What conclusion now shall we draw from the silence which our Saviour observes, with regard to these speculations? What but this; that we may safely neglect them altogether, and suffer those who deal in them to sink into the oblivion to which the present age seems disposed to consign them? May I be permitted to congratulate my cotemporaries on their wisdom in this particular? I would do it with the highest pleasure, could it with truth be said, that the disregard with which writings of this sort are received, is to be attributed solely to a persuasion of their futility and insignificance;

nificance; and not to an indifference about every thing serious, which seems to be the characteristic of the times. If, at the same time that this thorny path is deserted, the more open ones were frequented, and the science of morals studied in the same degree in which religious controversies fall into disrepute, it would reflect no small honour on the age, in which the change was effected. For the same reason that idle debates should be discarded, there should be introduced in their room those serious, manly studies, which will serve to give an amiable, consistent view of the theory of religion, and a just representation of its high obligations.*

But

* The Sketch of the Plan of the Society for promoting the Knowledge of the Scriptures, prefixed to the Commentaries and Essays, together with Locke's prefatory Essay to some of Paul's Epistles, suggest the right mode of studying the Bible, and were highly approved by the writer of this discourse. He also encouraged me to read the gospels according to Jebb's Harmony. Nor did he absolutely despise what are called controversial writings. With great avidity did he read Priestley's History of the Corruptions of

But it is not by mere silence, that our Saviour discourages the vain speculations of his disciples in matters of religion. It should seem as if he could not for a moment forget the design of his appearance in the world, or enter into any discourse, or any business, which was foreign to it. When a certain man, therefore, came to him with the request, that he would speak to his brother to divide with him the inheritance which he possessed (part of which, as he pretended, was his right) Jesus put off the affair with this short reply, "*Who made me a judge or divider?*" It does not fall within my "*province to settle affairs of this nature.*" At another time, which is more to my present purpose, he was called upon to settle one of those questions, which the idle curiosity of man has prompted him to

Christianity, and was decidedly, ever afterwards, as it is now expressed, a proper unitarian. At the same time he advised me not to read the book, till I had more accurately examined the contents of the scriptures, which he deemed the only pure fountain of heavenly truth. I mention these facts to illustrate his argument, and to prevent his being misunderstood. J. H.

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make, concerning the number of those who should be saved. The inquiry was, "Are there few that shall be saved?" The person had probably in his eye, the curious determination* — "The Most High hath made this world for many, but the world to come for few; there be many created, but few shall be saved;" and having observed the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, and the freedom with which he inveighed against the reigning vices of the age, expected to hear this extraordinary sentence confirmed by his authority. But Jesus, instead of making a direct reply, gives this excellent advice, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

The narrow, uncharitable temper which dictated this inquiry, did not pass without reproof on the occasion now referred to. For our Saviour having taken this opportunity to urge a hearty compliance with the doctrines of true religion, and a diligent concern to make a right im-

* 2 Esdras, viii. 1, 3.

provement

provement of them, reproves the temper which it breathed, with the observation, that converts to the truth should "come "from the east, and from the west, and "from the north, and from the south, "and sit down together in the kingdom "of God." To this he adds, "and "there are last, which shall be first, and "first which shall be last:" which may be considered as no obscure intimation of this great truth; that the advantages and rewards of true virtue lie within the reach of all, and that the excellencies of some, whom human pride had adjudged unworthy of a place in the family of God, shall raise them to a distinction, which their haughty censurers are unable to reach.

In this excellent manner does Jesus turn a conversation, which in its beginning had the most unpromising appearance, to the noble purpose of recommending moral virtue, and of assuring it of an equal recompense from the impartial goodness of the righteous Gover-

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nor of the world. Other similar instances of the care with which the Author of our religion leads off the minds of his disciples from high and unprofitable speculations, and fixes them down to some useful moral lesson, might be easily produced; but they cannot fail of offering themselves on the review of his history.

The excellent morality of the christian scheme is then its principal glory. The life and death of Jesus, the doctrines of forgiveness and immortality, all tend to the one great purpose, of improving the nature of man, and producing a higher resemblance to the image after which it was formed. In other words, the design of our religion is to lead us to the offices of piety and charity; or to suggest and recommend to our observance the purest precepts of morality.*

* Law's Reflections on the Life and Character of Christ, throw an air of lively beauty over the gospels, and demonstrate their admirable tendency to moral and holy improvement. Nor is Craig's Essay on the Life of Christ unworthy of attentive regard. J. H.

§ VIII. But

§ VIII.

But we are not to look for a complete system of morals, any more than of doctrines, in the discourses of Jesus and his immediate followers. Nor is this any reflection on them; none at least is intended; and no offence, it is hoped, will be taken at the assertion. A little attention bestowed on the subject will perhaps convince us, that it is not possible to reduce the perfect morality of the New Testament to method, or to comprehend its obligations within the bounds of any system of precepts.

Where there is no other design than the regulation of the external conduct, it will be no difficult matter to give all the requisite rules, and to reduce them to writing. But this being a part only of what christianity intends, it is less to be wondered at, if this be insufficient for its purpose. The regulation of the heart,
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the government of the temper, the cultivation and exercise of the best and most amiable dispositions, are its objects; and to these no written law can be adequate. It may be an easy matter to describe the character which should be maintained, and to point out the offices to which it directs; but a perfect enumeration of the particulars included in it, cannot be made in any human language.

It is prescribed to us, for instance, to be grateful for the benefits which we have received from God or man; and a recital is made of the favours which have been shown us, so as to produce a grateful disposition. But can any one ever reckon up all the ways, in which gratitude should express itself? It is easy to say, consider what you are able to do to promote the interest or the fame, the present or the future advantage of your benefactor; but to mention all the numberless attentions which a grateful heart will show, to point out all the methods of serving and pleasing which it will seek,

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is plainly impossible. Consider, again, the more comprehensive affections of the love of our neighbour, and the love of God; and they will appear to take a greater compass, and to include more particulars in them, than any words can express.

There is a law more ancient, more venerable, more perfect, than the laws of Zaleucus, of Charondas, of Solon, or Minos; it is not indeed to be equalled by any written institutions; it is, in a word, the law of God, and alone deserves the character given it by a great king, that "it is perfect." It is written by the finger of God, not on tables of stone or brass, but on the living tables of the human heart. The language of other codes is, This thou shalt do, from this or this thou shalt abstain. This enjoins it on every man to forbear every unjust, every unkind action, and to attend to every office of justice and charity; and refers it to his ingenuity alone to determine how far he is to proceed: rather indeed

deed it shows him, that the acts of virtue which it requires are innumerable; and that the degree of it which he should place before his eyes, as the object of his desires and endeavours, cannot be defined. The man who lives by these rules, is one who stands ever prepared for such pious and charitable actions, as he has it in his power to perform; who gives into no indulgences, allows of no appetites or passions which interfere with these sacred obligations, and values and attends to every instrumental duty in proportion to its subserviency to them.

It is obvious, that every system of morals, every religious institution, is useful and excellent, only so far as it calls up the attention of mankind to these grand duties. In this respect, with what a distinguishing excellence does the christian religion offer itself to our view? The first lines of this master-science are drawn by the instructions of Jesus, and especially in the light which his example reflects upon them, with such clearness and strength,

strength, that whosoever will give himself the trouble to trace them out, will find them a sure and safe rule in all the varieties of human life. This appears to be a just view of the christian scheme of morals; and a method of considering it, which will be attended with many advantages.

The easy reply which these observations will suggest, to most of the objections which have been made to this institution, as a rule of life, deserves our particular attention. It is well known, that both the conduct of Jesus himself, and the rules which he gave for the use of others, have been freely censured.

Whilst he was upon earth, his behaviour was considered as too free for the character which he sustained: he was, in consequence of this, called a gluttonous man, a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners; and the injunctions under which he laid his disciples, were represented as too lax for the professors of so pure

pure an institution. The clear, able manner, in which he vindicated himself on these heads, is too well known to make it necessary to repeat his arguments.*

In later ages his moral system has been complained of, as too strict and severe. In particular, his absolute prohibition of the indulgence of the evil affections of the heart, and his requisition of the forgiveness of injuries in such unlimited terms, have been urged as objections to the rule of duty, which his religion is supposed to contain. What sort of persons they appear to be, who object to these rules, or what would be the consequence in social life, if these restraints were taken off, I shall not stay to inquire. Common sense will direct us to limit all such particular commands, if necessary, by the great laws of justice and piety; and to observe them, as far as they consist with the love of God and of man, which

* See an admirable Defence of him in this respect against Chubb, in Bishop Law's Considerations, note 6, p. 301, edit. sixth. W. T.

the precepts and example of Christ concur to recommend, must reflect the highest honour on human nature.

This, however, is not the only charge brought against the moral part of the christian scheme. Whilst some have condemned it as too severe, others have represented it as materially deficient. It no where recommends, it is said, either private friendship, or the love of our country, or the endearing, useful offices of these affections. The method which has been taken by some to get over this difficulty is so curious, as to deserve being mentioned, were it only to show how far it is possible for men to proceed, in defence of the opinions which they have once adopted. The result of it is, that they are not virtues; that friendship is an amiable weakness, of which persons of an affectionate temper are indeed susceptible, and from which they may derive some private satisfactions, but that the great interests of mankind are little affected

fect by it.* Patriotism, however, cannot obtain even this commendation; but is considered rather as a crime, than an excellence.† Must it be allowed, then, that the friendly union of virtuous minds has nothing meritorious in it; that the intercourse by which they share the joys, and divide the sorrows of each other, is attended with no utility; and that the public has no concern in the advantages for the pursuit of knowledge and virtue, which friendship affords? Is it indeed true, that there is no merit in seeking the best interests of the society with which we are connected, in encouraging and promoting public designs, in rising up in defence of our country's just rights, and in endeavouring to enlarge and secure its essential privileges? Why then, the christian religion does not encourage the cultivation of these affections. If, on the contrary, it be acknowledged, that friend-

* See Melmoth's Appendix to his Translation of Cicero's *Laelius*, a Dialogue on Friendship. W. T.

† See Dr. Price's excellent Discourse on the Love of our Country. W. T.

ship is a discipline for the higher virtues; and that the love of our country tends, in its just consequences, to universal benevolence; it will follow, that every precept to charity which we read, every example of it which we behold, tends to form the friend and the patriot.*

What noble views of moral duties does christianity afford, when it is thus considered! In this light it will be of admirable use to the christian preacher, and assist him to draw up such discourses on the duties of the christian life, as will command the attention, and direct the practice of those to whom they are addressed. He will be careful, indeed, to lay down rules, and deliver precepts of morality with sufficient precision and minuteness, to direct the judgment and conduct of his hearers; but he will be still more concerned to form and cherish those moral principles in the mind, which

* There is an admirable account of christian morality in Leland's Essay on the Necessity of Divine Revelation, vol. II. p. 227—251. J. H.

will make every man, in a great measure, his own instructor and guide.

A mind, charged with these ideas of morality, cannot fail of applying the truths of religion to their proper use, to support and improve the virtue of those who receive them. Here the preacher will avail himself of the doctrines which are expressly taught, or evidently referred to, in the sacred scriptures. From this most excellent book he will borrow the justest descriptions of the divine perfections and government, so as to point it out to his hearers as their indispensable duty, and their highest interest, to yield a ready and unreserved obedience to all God's commandments. But a still higher advantage will accrue from this study; it will enable him to give such a representation of the mercy of God, as may encourage all the wicked to repent of their sins, and forsake them.

There is something very striking in the idea which the scriptures give us of

Jesus Christ, as the founder and head of a kingdom, which is begun in this world, and consists of all those who govern themselves by the laws of it, in whatever age, or in whatever country they may live. The subjects of it, it is true, have never yet been assembled, or appeared under one visible head. They may some of them have lived together, and conversed with each other, without discovering that they belonged to the same society; and may have acknowledged those who had no right, and disowned those who had a right, to the privileges of this kingdom. Still, however, it is a pleasing thought, that all the righteous, under all their different forms, and in all their various dispersions, stand in the nearest relation to each other, as the subjects of one prince, as governed by the same laws, and as designed for a nearer and more intimate union with another in the future world.

For this kingdom, though at present in a situation where all things are liable

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to change, and subject to the infirmities of which the earth and all its inhabitants partake, shall hereafter appear with inconceivable dignity and splendour, and shall continue till every worthy member is received into it; and the purposes for which it was erected being fully answered, its great Head shall deliver it up to his Father, from whom he derived his authority, that God may be all in all.*

Who will not acknowledge, that it gives a peculiar dignity to the rules of virtue and religion, to consider them as the laws of this illustrious society? It is called a kingdom of righteousness; and it is with the utmost propriety, that it has this appellation. From this it derives its original; to this it owes its support; and it will be completed in the perfect righteousness of all its members.

Another advantage of this representation of christianity, is the assistance which it affords in forming or improving our

* 1 Cor. xv. 24—28.

ideas of God's moral government. The character of our Saviour rises to an inconceivable height of dignity and importance, when we consider the nature and the extent of his dominion. The whole race of mankind are his subjects; and all those who refuse to govern themselves by his laws, as far as they are discovered to them, shall be excluded from his presence, and have their everlasting condition determined by his righteous sentence; whilst those, who have humbly desired and endeavoured to observe the righteous laws which he has given, shall rise to some share of his glory and happiness, and have their abode in those regions, where righteousness shall obtain an universal, an everlasting dominion. How contemptible do all the kingdoms of the earth appear, when compared with this glorious kingdom! The meanest subject of this great prince, in true excellence exceeds the greatest potentate on earth. How great then must he himself be! And above all, how high must our ideas rise of his universal providence, and of his

his uncontrolled authority, to whom the Head of this society, when he has subdued all things to himself, shall finally submit ! *

PART III.

It might in all reason be expected, that a fair representation of these truths and duties, in their connection with each other, especially if accompanied with a view of their present and future consequences, would reach every heart, and be effectual, not only to instruct men in their duty, but to persuade them to the practice of it. This will doubtless be the case with

* Since then, christianity is purely a moral scheme, would not a just delineation of the different features in the character of Jesus Christ be a work greatly to be desired? Might not his meekness, gentleness, modesty and humility, his friendship, patriotism and benevolence, his patience, contentment, fortitude, perseverance in doing good, and resignation, his wisdom in instruction, his prudent and pious behaviour deserve, as far as they were capable of it, a distinct and separate review, illustrated by instances, and applied to practice? J. H.

those

those who will give a proper attention to these interesting subjects. But those who neglect to hear the word altogether, or will not employ the thought necessary to understand what is said, and to impress it upon their minds, will, through mere carelessness, or under the influence of worldly passions and cares, find it ineffectual to their best improvement.

This leads me to consider, what the speaker should do to win the attention of his hearers. Are there any arts of pleasing, by which he may insinuate himself into their favour, and conciliate a proper regard to his opinions and reasonings? It seems to have been the general opinion of mankind that there are. Hence, to please has been usually considered as the third branch of oratory, and thought conducive to the instruction and persuasion, which should be chiefly regarded by every public speaker. It is not then to be sought for its own sake, but as subservient to a higher purpose; and the desire to please, if it spring from vanity

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or ambition, is contemptible in proportion to the importance of the subjects on which the discourse turns. On a frivolous subject, it will be more excusable to address the discourse to the imaginations of the audience, and the speaker will merit a milder censure, if childish ornaments are sought, and even displayed with a fondness for admiration and applause. In every harangue, however, such addresses to the fancy, as serve to call off the attention of those who hear, from the subject to the orator, must be condemned; and in the general, no ornaments can be agreeable to a person of sound judgment, which are far-fetched, and especially which are inconsistent with, or foreign to, its professed design. This is fixed upon by an excellent critic, who appears to have been a friend to all the graces of speaking and writing, which could be admitted, as what constituted the great difference between Demosthenes and Cicero, and inclined him to give the preference to the Grecian orator. “Cicero,” says he, “embellishes every
“ thing

"thing which he handles, &c. His art
 "is wonderful, but still we discern it.
 "Whilst he is concerned for the safety of
 "the republic, he does not forget that he
 "is an orator, nor does he let others
 "forget it. Demosthenes seems transf-
 "ported, and to have nothing in view
 "but his country. He does not study
 "what is beautiful, but naturally falls
 "into it without reflecting. We cannot
 "criticise him, for he is master of our
 "passions. We consider the thing which
 "he says, and not his words. We
 "lose sight of him, and think of Philip
 "only, who usurps every thing. I am
 "charmed with these two orators, but I
 "confess that Cicero's prodigious art,
 "and magnificent eloquence, charms me
 "less than the vehement simplicity of
 "Demosthenes.*

Nothing can be juster or more solid
 than the reason assigned for the preference

* See a *Letter from the Archbishop of Cambray to Mr. Fontenelle, secretary to the French Academy*, p. 236, 237.

here

here given. But if it be expected on other subjects, that the speaker keep out of sight, and forbear every thing that has the appearance of a design to display his own art; it is with yet higher reason, that we demand this modesty in the sacred orator, who ought to be entirely engrossed with his subject, and to discover nothing, to mean nothing but the desire of giving a just and plain representation of it. This will preserve him from the declamatory manner, in which some preachers appear so much to delight; and confine him to that noble simplicity, which is the only true ornament of moral and religious discourses.

The same observation will apply to the delivery, as to the style of sermons. If the sentiments, which they ought to convey, be deeply impressed on the preacher's own mind, they will almost supersede the necessity of rules on this subject. Let him but keep clear of affectation, and consider his own powers; let him allow himself in that animation of language
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and manner, which a sense of the truth and importance of his doctrine will give; and he can hardly fail of rising above mediocrity, and will probably have every excellence of which his abilities admit.

It is readily acknowledged to be a desirable thing, that a good discourse be well delivered. If nothing more essential be sacrificed to it, the care which some have taken to recommend their public services by a just pronounciation, and by an animated and graceful address, deserves great commendation; and the success, with which it has been attended, will encourage every young preacher to seek this accomplishment. It must, however, be owned, that too much stress has sometimes been laid upon it; and that his powers of speaking have, in some cases, procured the preacher a degree of applause which his compositions by no means merited. This unhappy consequence too has in some instances been seen—that he has himself attended to them too much, and considered rather
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how, than what, he should preach. Hence, from a consciousness of his excellencies in this art, and secure of pleasing by them, he has neglected those studies which are necessary to give his compositions their true value, and to secure the happy effects which they are intended to produce.

My meaning briefly is, that this, with every other pleasing, ornamental art, be employed to subserve the views and purposes of real merit; but that it never usurp its place, or set off a discourse which wants the other and higher excellencies.

The same rules should be observed in the devotional compositions, as in those which have been already mentioned. Such as are called upon to draw up prayers for their own use, or for that of others, ought to have a clear view of the truths on which they are founded, and a lively perception of the sentiments which they intend to express; and then such
words

words naturally follow, as the several parts of the service require. A just sense of the divine character, and a serious recollection of the mercies of God, will easily direct to the proper language of praise and thanksgiving; the consciousness of guilt will teach us how to confess our sins, and in what words to deprecate the justice, and implore the mercy of heaven; and the persuasion of man's ignorance and weakness, and God's all-sufficiency, as it shows the propriety of prayer, will supply the best directions as to the manner in which it should be performed. He who is destitute of these sentiments, can hardly be expected to succeed himself in compositions of this sort, or to be a good judge of those of others; and he whose own mind is really impressed with them, with a tolerable acquaintance with language, and skill in composition, can hardly miscarry.

It is not my intention to enter into the questions of the propriety and use of stated forms of prayer; or of reciting rather

rather than reading those which are drawn up from time to time, for general or particular occasions. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages; the ends of devotion may be attained under any of them: these are among the questions, which every man may safely be left to answer, according to his particular taste and genius; and which all christian societies should determine for themselves, as their wisdom and judgment shall enable them.

It should, however, be strongly inculcated on the preacher, who is to conduct the devotions of his fellow-worshippers, as well as impart instructions to them, that he cannot be too careful to observe the greatest simplicity of expression and delivery in every part of this service. The style of devotional compositions should be more particularly distinguished by its perspicuity and simplicity. If any sentiment be so expressed, as to require any thing additional to explain, to guard,

to confine, or enlarge it, it is so far improper in an address to the great Being, who is present with all his creatures, so as to know all their thoughts and purposes. But if it be censured as an impropriety to depart from this noble simplicity of expression in devotional composition, how unbecoming is it in him who leads the devotions of others, to be studious about what may be most pleasing to those who shall join in them! If he who appears to pray, or professes to speak to God, discover a fondness for the beauties of language, or the graces of delivery; if he be more desirous to set himself off to advantage, than to give a natural, unaffected expression to the devout sentiments, with which his heart is impressed; it may be presumed that he does not pray himself at all, nor can it be expected that he should assist the devotions of other worshippers. But I think it unnecessary to say any thing further on this head, being fully of opinion, that whoever has attentively considered the doctrines of religion,

ligion, and the temper of mind to which they lead, and reflected at all on the manner in which it should be expressed in an address to God, will generally succeed in this part of his office; whether he draw up forms beforehand, or clothe the thoughts, which he has carefully digested, in such words as offer themselves at the time; whether he read or recite his prayers.*

THE CONCLUSION.

The same great objects which direct and animate the public discourses of the christian minister will naturally carry him

* On this subject, however, reference may be made to a work entitled, *Free and Candid Disquisitions relating to the Dissenters*, part the first, a work which, in my opinion, the author ought to have finished, and need not have been ashamed or afraid to own. The question about forms of prayer is also discussed in Paley's *Moral Philosophy*, p. 356—363. J. H.

through the other duties of his office with a right spirit. His whole behaviour to his people in the house of prayer, and in all other places, in his common visits, in his attendance on the sick, and in those services, which peculiarly respect the rising generation, will be directed by the same principles, and conducted to the same purpose. But these are particulars, which have been so frequently discussed already, that however intimate their connection may be with the other parts of this discourse, I shall be excused, if I content myself with this general mention of them.

Whoever will reflect for a moment on the end of the ministerial office, will acknowledge that the execution of it ought to engage all the attention which we can bestow. Every pursuit in life, should be conducted with a zeal proportioned to its importance. To be zealous about trifles, is a proof of a little mind: to be zealous in a bad cause, argues only a higher degree of

of wickedness: on the same principle, he cannot reasonably expect to escape censure, who enters on a good cause with coolness and indifference. But though the preacher has the highest incentives to zeal, he, above all others, will be expected to temper it with a serious, humble spirit; and to regulate it by the most extensive charity for all that difference of opinion which has ever prevailed in the world. Is it necessary to add (those who have been attentive to the spirit of this discourse will hardly need the hint) that the zeal for which I contend, has for its object not the peculiarities of a party, but those great things, which in profession, at least, are principal in every party? As far, however, as any one is of opinion, that the particular modes which he adopts, are conducive to what is of chief importance in religion, he may be allowed to plead earnestly for them; and whilst no infringement is made on christian candour, to be zealously affected towards them.

This zeal to discharge his duty, will naturally induce the preacher to inquire, what means will be most effectual to secure success.

First; Every considerate person will acknowledge, that it is very necessary to the success of a christian minister, that he be himself a sincere exemplary christian. If any one, indeed, can stand up, and inculcate upon others, what he is persuaded in his own mind is not true, he discovers so much guilt and meanness, that I should not hope for the least success from any thing which I could say for his conviction and amendment. It is a character so very detestable, and at the same time so contemptible, that I would flatter myself, the number of those who merit it, is but inconsiderable. They are not, however, the ministers whom I have in my eye in the present advice. It is at least supposable, that he who does not observe the rules which the gospel prescribes, may yet believe its divine original,

nally, and sincerely recommend it to the attention of the world. It is through infirmity alone, and in opposition to his better principles, that he does the things which he condemns, and violates the laws which he professes to observe. But, how necessary is it, that a teacher of religion should guard against this inconsistency! How will he answer the questions which are with such plain, striking eloquence proposed by the apostle? "Thou therefore who teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou who makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?"

None, however, but such as are lost to all sense of propriety and decency, can allow themselves in the violation of those rules, which they prescribe to others; but it is generally expected, that those who teach in the christian church should not only be decent, but exemplary in their conduct, and fix to themselves a higher standard of morals than other

christians. They are chargeable with great inconsistency, it is true, who are themselves immoral, and yet severe in their censures on the faults, and even on the infirmities of their ministers: they do not consider, I suppose, that, for the time at least, they assume the character which requires such purity of manners. But I excuse their mistake; I freely forgive their severity; and I wish all the ministers of religion to remember, that they must count upon such treatment; and that it behoves them, therefore, to be particularly circumspect in their behaviour, and to order their whole conversation so, as to reflect the highest honour on their profession. Thus will they stop the mouths of those who are ill-affected to them; and, which is of higher importance, conciliate the esteem of good men, and most probably secure the ends of their ministry.

It is so indispensable in the ministerial character, that he who undertakes it, should

should himself afford an example of the rules which he enjoins; that, unless this be his fixed resolution, it were better he should turn his thoughts to some other employment, than defeat the purposes of his ministrations by an unsuitable conduct.

Secondly; It is besides of great importance, that the preacher be a man of extensive knowledge, and good learning. In order to speak or write well on any subject, it is desirable to have a general knowledge at least of every one. This is a very necessary qualification for such as propose to discourse on moral and religious subjects. They have frequent occasion to refer to other arts and sciences, in order to illustrate their doctrine, and to render it more intelligible, or at least more pleasing. If, therefore, they are ignorant on these heads, they must either omit such references altogether, or run the hazard of exposing themselves, by their mistakes, to the censure of their more intelligent hearers.

On

On many subjects it is not easy to acquire knowledge, without some tolerable share of learning. It is desirable, therefore, that the preacher should study books as well as men; those more especially written on the duties, which he is called upon to explain and enforce. Thus will he improve his own ideas, by comparing them with those of others; or avoid the errors into which they appear to have fallen.

On the revival of letters, after a long reign of ignorance and barbarism, the chief object of learned men was to recover the works of the ancient Latin, and afterwards of the Greek authors, and to gain an accurate knowledge of their contents; and not only to read, but imitate them on the same or similar subjects. Accordingly, to write correct and elegant Latin and Greek, in prose or verse, was the whole to which the ambition of the greater part of scholars aspired. This, in process of time, fell into disgrace, under

der the appellation of the mere study of words. The attention of scholars was turned to things; and the learned languages, as they are called, began to be neglected. Now it must be acknowledged, that an acquaintance with words alone, however accurate and extensive, is indeed a poor attainment: but whatever knowledge a man may have, unless he be a master of language, he cannot impart it to others; nor can he enrich his mind with the sentiments of writers in ancient or foreign languages, if he be a stranger to the words with which they are clothed. The knowledge of the tongues in which the Holy Scriptures are written, is of essential importance. Those who wish to have a just acquaintance with the contents of these books, will be unwilling to trust to any translation; and it will bring a great reflection on the christian preacher not to be able to consult the original.

But there is an obvious difference between paying a proper attention to this branch

branch of learning, and making it the sole employment of our thoughts. I would wish, indeed, that the works of the ancients should not be laid aside, till it be more evident, than it has yet been made, that they are not worth reading;* but not that they should fill up those hours, which may be devoted to higher and more interesting speculations. It will certainly conduce to the reputation and the success of the christian preacher, to have a general acquaintance with all the fields of human literature.

There was a time when there was little learning or knowledge, except amongst the ministers of religion; and such of them as were ignorant, were seldom known to be so, but to the more learned of their own order. The state of things in the present age is widely different;

* It has been humorously said, "Aristotle is not so great a fool, as those, who have never read his works, take him to be."

so much so, that there never was, perhaps, any period, in which ignorance would be more certainly detected, or more infallibly bring contempt on those who should appear to merit the imputation.

Whatever reflections may have been cast on the preachers in dissenting churches, as deficient in point of learning, there seems to have been no just foundation for them. I will venture to say, that they have not in any age been generally unacquainted with such branches of science, as then engaged the attention of the public. I congratulate my cotemporaries on the reputation which the present race of ministers support in this particular; and consider it as a pleasing circumstance, that many of those who are now entering on the ministry amongst us, afford the prospect of their keeping up this character.

I mean not the least reflection on the present state of learning amongst the ministers of the establishment; or to make a comparison

comparison between them and their dissenting brethren in this, or in any other instance. I shall only add, that the latter, if inferior to the established clergy in some branches, are by no means so in others. Their seminaries of learning labour under many disadvantages, which it is not my present design to enumerate. Several of them, however, are conducted in a manner favourable to the interests of sound learning, and likely to transmit a taste for science and literature to succeeding ages.

Should the knowledge of this fact make its way into our universities, or other public schools, so as to excite a spirit of emulation in them; it will, I hope, raise only the friendly contention of gaining those literary accomplishments in a yet higher degree, which may subserve the interests of real christianity. Would to God, it might lead to such an union amongst all the sects into which the christian world is divided, that, forgetting all the causes of an unfriendly alienation,

alienation, which have hitherto subsisted, they might combine their united forces in the cause of learning, virtue, and true religion!

Lastly; I would wish the christian preacher the advantage which an easy address and polished manners will give him. The foundation of this accomplishment must be in the mind itself, which, in order to take this external polish, must possess a native and an improved benevolence. Nothing short of this can "gentle the condition." If this natural politeness be wanting, all the appearances of it, which may be assumed, deserve no higher appellation than that of a hollow complaisance or mean servility, to which the roughest manners of unaffected sincerity are infinitely preferable. Where it has a real existence, some attention, however, may still be necessary, to express it in the most easy and unaffected manner. The rules for this engaging behaviour I shall not take upon me to recite; it is perhaps

perhaps impossible for the most accomplished gentleman to give a complete detail; but the desire to please, and the willingness to be pleased, just referred to, will supply the place of the far greater part of them.

These manners are peculiarly necessary for those, who have frequent calls to converse with people in the higher stations of life. They will be able to enter into such company with less pain to themselves, and to bear a part in the conversation with more honour to their characters. A good minister will preserve the dignity of virtue in every situation; but he will at the same time be solicitous to pay those attentions to mankind, which will give the most favourable idea of his profession, and promote his success in discharging its offices. It will conduce very much to this, to be able to support the character of the gentleman, as well as that of the christian.

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If, moreover, there be at any time a proper call to introduce any moral or religious subject into common conversation, he will be able to acquit himself well on the occasion ; and even to proceed to the painful, difficult business of admonition and reproof, when necessary, with the fairest prospect of success.

Thus, my reverend brethren, have I pointed out to you the great object on which your eyes should always be fixed in your public services, and in every other situation into which you may be brought—to assist your fellow-christians in attaining that temper, and forming that character, which will, through the blessing of God, procure them every desirable enjoyment in the present world, and infallibly secure their future, and everlasting happiness.

There cannot be a more interesting inquiry than that which has now been made into the most probable means of success

in this employment. Some things, which have been said, you will think of greater importance, others of less: but you will, I am persuaded, afford them all a serious consideration. It will be acknowledged of some advantage, to acquire such a behaviour, as may be generally pleasing. It is still more necessary to keep up a constant attention to those studies, which will improve your understanding, and procure you the reputation of knowledge and learning; but what is of highest consequence, is, to preserve that purity of manners, which the ministerial office requires, and to make your example as amiable and useful as possible to all with whom you converse.

I must not conclude without acknowledging, that I have the highest regard for the temper and characters of my christian brethren, to whom I have addressed these advices. The preacher himself needs, at least, as much as any who now sit to hear, the word of exhortation; and

and if he does not deceive himself, he would be happy to have his ideas on this subject improved by the experience of those who have so many calls to consider it, and his endeavours quickened by their example. He submits what has been said to the candid judgment of all whom it may concern; wishing in particular, that the younger brethren may enter into the office with such views of its design, and such resolutions to preserve a constant attention to them, as may ensure them all desirable success, and give them everlasting cause for rejoicing.

THE END.

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